

Nadhim Zahawi MP  
Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

12 May 2021

Dear Mr Zahawi,

**Making vaccination a condition of employment in older adult care homes**

The Department of Health and Social Care recently published a consultation on making COVID vaccination mandatory for people working in older adult care homes. The consultation document asks questions specifically aimed at care home managers and staff which we do not feel able to answer. However, we do have a view on the overarching issue, which we set out in this letter.

The British Geriatrics Society (BGS) is the membership association for professionals specialising in the healthcare of older people in the UK. Founded in 1947, we now have over 4,000 members and we are the only society in the UK offering specialist expertise in the wide range of healthcare needs of older people.

As you are aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating for older people with 90% of deaths occurring in the 65+ age group. Care homes have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic with many care homes losing both residents and staff to the virus. The swift arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine has therefore been very welcome, and we were pleased that care home residents and staff were among the first to be offered the vaccine.

However, we do not support the introduction of mandatory vaccinations specifically for care home staff. We understand the arguments for requiring health and care staff to have received vaccinations as a condition of employment, including as a means of controlling the spread of Covid infections. However, it is not clear why care home staff in particular are being singled out for mandatory vaccination in the first instance. If care home staff are required to be vaccinated as a condition of



employment, this same condition should also apply to NHS staff. While it is true that care home staff are in regular contact with older people who are vulnerable to COVID-19, this is also true of a majority of NHS staff. With a few notable exceptions (obstetrics and paediatrics in particular), most NHS staff members, regardless of their specialty, will have contact with older people more than any other population group. If mandatory vaccinations are to apply, they must apply across health and social care equally. Care home staff and residents are already subject to rigorous COVID testing designed to protect residents from outbreaks.

It is also worth noting that some care home staff have safety concerns about the vaccine which, while they may be unfounded, need to be addressed. We urge the Government to actively engage with care home staff to identify those concerns and provide information to reassure them that the vaccines are safe. This information must be provided in a range of languages and formats, acknowledging the diversity within the care home workforce.

Care home staff have been under an extraordinary amount of pressure during the pandemic – they are a skilled workforce which is under-staffed, under-paid and under-appreciated. We fear that placing barriers like mandatory vaccination on this workforce will result in people seeking employment elsewhere, exacerbating the existing staff shortages in care homes. Our view is that making vaccination mandatory should be considered a last resort and, were it to be introduced, it should apply equally to health and social care staff.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jennifer Burns  
President

Prof Adam Gordon  
President Elect