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Community health and care leaders call on the Cabinet Secretary to take urgent action to protect those caring for the most sick and vulnerable during pandemic.

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Organisations representing the community health and social care workforce across Scotland have today written jointly to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to call for urgent action to be taken to protect those caring for the most sick and vulnerable within communities across Scotland during the current pandemic.

The Royal College of General Practitioners Scotland (RCGP Scotland), the Royal College of Nursing Scotland (RCN Scotland) and Scottish Care have together written to the Cabinet Secretary to call for urgent action to be taken over the level of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) being supplied to health and social care workers caring for the most vulnerable in communities across Scotland.

The organisations are calling for the updated guidance on PPE, which is due to be issued shortly, to recommend a consistent approach regarding the level of PPE required across both acute and community settings. They have also called for assurances that the further stocks of PPE which have now been issued reach those areas of the health and social care sector that need it most – with community care receiving its fair share.

The health and social care leaders call for assurances to be provided and urgent action to be taken to protect the health and social care workforce to ensure that they can continue to provide vital care in the community during this pandemic.

The letter states:

“As the number of patients with Covid-19 increases, our members will increasingly be caring for the most sick and vulnerable within their own homes in communities across Scotland. Many of these people will be showing advanced symptoms of Covid-19, but many more may be asymptomatic, although are likely to still be infectious. Providing this vital care has never been more important, but our members tell us that they are apprehensive about delivering this care, given the current level of PPE that they have been provided with. In short, they are fearful that the level of protection that they have been provided with will not be enough to shield them from the worst effects of Covid-19.”

In their letter to the Cabinet Secretary, the community health and care leaders go on to stress that:

“We are calling for assurances to be provided and urgent action to be taken to protect those who are going above and beyond to care for the most sick and vulnerable within the community at this incredibly difficult time. We need our health and social care workforce to be health and protected as they deal with the greatest public health challenge of our lifetime.”

Commenting on the joint letter, Dr Carey Lunan, Chair of RCGP Scotland said:

“It is deeply worrying that colleagues working across community health and social care in Scotland remain concerned about the level of personal protective equipment that they have been provided with. As this pandemic inevitably worsens, GPs along with community nursing colleagues and social carers will increasingly care for the most sick and vulnerable within their own homes and community care settings across Scotland. This comes with inherent risk and all possible steps need to be taken to protect this vital workforce. Standing shoulder to shoulder with leaders in nursing and social care, we are today calling for urgent action to be taken to ensure that our community workforce has what it needs to carry out their role safely and effectively at this critical time.”

Theresa Fyffe, RCN Scotland Director said:

“It is completely unacceptable that weeks into this crisis, there are colleagues who still have not been provided with the right personal protective equipment.

“That’s why we have joined the Royal College of General Practitioners and Scottish Care in writing to the Cabinet Secretary, calling for urgent action to protect those who are going above and beyond to care for the most sick and vulnerable in our communities at this incredibly difficult time.

“They now need more equipment and fewer excuses. Every minute we wait is a minute too long. All staff, no matter where they work, must feel safe. We will continue to raise this issue until it is resolved.”

Donald Macaskill, Chief Executive of Scottish Care commented:

“It is clearly in everybody’s best interests to ensure that we not only keep our care staff safe but that we can reduce the spread of this virus by the use of appropriate PPE equipment.    
Timely access to sufficient PPE equipment is an issue across the health and social care sector. We absolutely understand and appreciate the challenges associated with prioritisation of resources and applaud the social care triage system and those involved in its establishment, but we need an urgent move towards a preventative approach to equipping frontline staff with the right level of protective equipment.”