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**Dear Colleague**

4th May 2020

Dear BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) colleague

Many of you will be concerned about the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on BAME colleagues in the UK. We understand that this is worrying and we want to do all we can to ensure you feel safe and supported during this difficult time.

At a national level an inquiry has been launched to understand why people from BAME backgrounds appear to be disproportionately affected by coronavirus. While we await these findings we are taking the following steps to protect you and your families and have made the following commitment to you:

1. Your manager will be supported to support you. We have taken the decision to include BAME colleagues into the vulnerable and at risk group and are asking managers to have conversations with all BAME colleagues as they would for all within the vulnerable group. We have updated our risk assessment which supports managers with these conversations to ensure they understand the concerns and needs of our BAME colleagues and their families.

We encourage you to feel confident discussing any concerns you may have about COVID-19 and the impact on you and your family with your managers. While we don’t yet have any conclusive research or national guidance, we feel that this is the right approach to take. We also hope that you feel comfortable sharing any concerns you have about any underlying conditions so that these can be taken into consideration when planning your work.

1. To help understand your needs if you are redeployed into a different role the Equality Inclusion Team has developed a Redeployment Equality Impact Assessment (REQIA). All managers will complete this with you to understand the possible equality impacts in the redeployment role. The receiving manager will ensure that if an impact has been identified that all efforts will be made to mitigate the impact ensuring you can work safely.
2. We will include BAME colleagues in the priority list for testing this will as a minimum be during the first five days of symptoms. We encourage all BAME colleagues or their family members with symptoms to get tested as soon as possible. You will not be refused a test. This also applies to any of your family members who live with you (who are also in the first five days of symptoms). We are also offering the opportunity for BAME staff to be tested regardless of if they have symptoms and would ask you contact bchft.hrsupport@nhs.net if you would like to take up this offer.
3. All staff should have access to the PPE that protects them for the appropriate setting and context. Please ensure that you adhere to infection prevention and control precautions and if you are required to wear PPE you know how to safely put it on and take if off. All BAME colleagues who are required to use a FFP3 mask will be supported to be Fit tested. A fit test is a Health and Safety requirement and ensures an adequate seal of the mask. The training includes how to safely put on and remove the mask each time you wear one to ensure you are protected while working with COVID 19 patients.

Please contact the Infection Prevention and Control team if your role requires you to wear an FFP3 mask so that this can be arranged. Fit testing takes around 20 -30 minutes and the trainer tester will be able to support you with any questions you may have.

1. If you need to take sick leave due to COVID-19 related illness, we can reassure you that this will not affect your job role or future progress. We are committed to supporting the development of our BAME colleagues and will continue to do so. Please do not hesitate to report any symptoms that concern you and ensure you are tested to protect yourself and your family. We will ensure that you have regular follow up and contact with your line manager if you are on sick leave related to COVID-19 or need to isolate due to a family member with symptoms. We want to make sure that you are safe and well supported during this difficult time.
2. Your wellbeing is very important. We have heard that many BAME colleagues are understandably worried about their own and their families’ health at this time. Paul Singh, Equality and Diversity Manager is leading our staff wellbeing offer to ensure this service meets everyone’s needs. I have also enclosed the Health and wellbeing offer which you can access.
3. You will not suffer a detriment for speaking up or raising any concerns. We are working in partnership with Trade Union colleagues and our Freedom to Speak Up Guardians: it is vital that all staff can raise concerns and candidly report events which increase risk, particularly for the higher risk groups who often find it harder to speak up.
4. We want to heard directly from you about your concerns and experiences and how we ca support our BAME staff. We strongly encourage you to join our BAME Staff network. You can contact gurwinder.singh@nhs.net or yassar.mohammed@nhs.net for details on how to join. We also encourage you to join our live chat engagement events with all BAME staff across the Trust to ascertain what issues they are facing, any concerns and anxieties and what the Trust can do to support staff. These have been communicated via our Trust communication channels and you can book onto a session by emailing bchft.communications@nhs.net.
5. The development of Community Engagement Inclusion Strategy that will develop the resilience of Black Country communities with a focus on engagement with BAME communities, staff, patients and carers.

We are alert to the affect the coronavirus pandemic may be having on our colleagues and are looking closely to see if the pandemic is affecting different colleague groups differently. By understanding this, we will be able to act on any trends or themes as soon as possible.

This is a high priority for our Trust at this time.

Thank you very much for your contribution during this difficult time. You are very valuable members of our community and we are really grateful for your ongoing commitment and hard work.

Yours sincerely



**Ashi Williams**

**Director of People**

**Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**