

Protect health and social care workers and refer their deaths to the coroner

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Protect health and social care workers and refer their deaths to the coroner, says *The BMJ* Editor

All deaths of health and social care workers during the covid-19 pandemic should be referred to the coroner for independent review, says Dr. Fiona Godlee, Editor in Chief of *The BMJ* today.

With many hundreds of deaths around the world, and over 100 reported in the UK, "it is impossible not to feel let down by political and healthcare leaders who, while sloganning, clapping for, and praising the NHS, have so evidently failed to protect those who work within it," she writes.

Her call echoes that of Professor John Robertson, Consultant Surgeon at the University of Nottingham and colleagues, who say "as this pandemic unfolds and we witness the deaths of our fellow healthcare professionals during active service and under controversial occupational conditions, there arises the inevitable question of whether the coroner should be involved?"

Writing in this week's journal, they say it is imperative that there is no further delay in providing every healthcare [worker](#) with effective PPE, and argue that, "until it is clear how much transmission is due to aerosol as well as droplet infection, surgical masks should not be considered effective protection."

They are also damning about the government's attempts to shift the blame for staff deaths onto community infection, and have no faith in the government's proposed investigation. "Without referring each [death](#) to the coroner, can we be confident that the circumstances of their employment have not resulted in these individuals paying the ultimate price through their daily work?"

Godlee argues that the UK government's response to this crisis "has been characterised from the beginning by complacency, arrogance and delay, worsened in subsequent weeks by broken promises about the supply of PPE, apparent ignorance of the situation on the frontline, and poorly explained and shifting guidance.

"So that we can learn for the future, honour the sacrifice, and seek compensation for families, all deaths of health and social care workers should be referred to the coroner for independent review," she concludes.

More information: Opinion: Covid-19: Protect health and social care workers and refer their deaths to the coroner, [blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/04/21/c ... aths-to-the-coroner/](https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/04/21/c...aths-to-the-coroner/)

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