

How we're helping the most vulnerable in our society deal with the COVID-19 outbreak

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How does the social care system cope with the coronavirus outbreak and keep its workforce safe? And how do you discuss the sensitive topic of end-of-life care? Professor Arpana Verma and colleagues are

investigating solutions to these critical questions.

During a global pandemic, protecting the most [vulnerable people](#) in our society becomes an even greater and more urgent challenge. This is compounded by the need to safeguard those who care for them.

Professor Arpana Verma is Head of the Division of Population Health, Health Services Research and Primary Care in the University's Faculty of Medicine, Biology and Health. She is the Director of Manchester Urban Collaboration on Health, a WHO-collaborating centre, and honorary Consultant in Public Health at Public Health England.

Professor Verma is working with colleagues across the University, Greater Manchester healthcare bodies and researchers from the University of Salford and Manchester Metropolitan University to determine a set of evidence-based interventions that will protect the elderly and vulnerable population, as well as the social care workforce, during the COVID-19 outbreak.

"We've gathered a Greater Manchester group of researchers together who can help with [care homes](#) and residential homes and those people that are receiving care in their own homes," says Professor Verma.

"Similarly to how we're trying to protect frontline NHS workers, we're trying to do the same thing for social care. We're trying to ensure that we protect our older adults or vulnerable groups that might be receiving care from others. There's loads of guidance and lots of things very specific to [coronavirus](#), and if you've got a full workforce, then it might be possible to do all of that now. But how possible is it if you're depleted? Being able to protect the workforce also allows protection of the patient."

Plans are also under way to link up with work done by the interdisciplinary Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on

Ageing around Advanced Care Plans, which help plan and record decisions about future care.

"A secondary outcome would be to ensure that we have the ability to talk about where people want to be if they get this virus, and to open the conversation about where they would want to die," Professor Verma says.

"This would mean being able to help people at the front line have those difficult conversations and see where the best place is for people once they develop the disease, and perhaps actioning some of the underlying mechanisms that are already in place. Once we've got the research, we don't want it sit on a dusty shelf. It's about rapid communication, not just for the participants but the wider communities as well."

Professor Verma is grateful that the University can pull together experts from multiple fields to solve pressing real-world problems like coronavirus.

"Where else would you get that brain power except at a big university like ours? We are greater than the sum of our parts," she says. "That's what interdisciplinary science is all about."

Professor Verma believes communication is the key to turn research into impact: "If we're going to reduce inequalities, we've got to take everyone with us," she says. "What's really hard is ensuring that we're giving our messages to a wide range of different groups. Communication is absolutely fundamental and, if anything, coronavirus has shown us how differently people communicate and then how much it can affect how people behave. I can't imagine any better natural experiment than what happens whenever the prime minister says something and how it influences everything from individuals all the way through to the media. That's another crucial part we really need to play. We've got a really

privileged position that allows us to communicate with the public and maintaining that trust means we've got to be absolutely spot on with our communications. It's about leaving no one behind."

Provided by University of Manchester

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