

Dear Constituent

The good news is the NHS has coped with the surge in Covid 19 cases in late March and early April. National capacity is well above the current number of Covid 19 patients, with numbers of new hospital admissions falling. Short of a massive unexpected surge in cases to levels much higher than early April we can conclude the NHS has the beds and staff to handle this virus. The Royal Berks has plenty of spare Intensive care beds thanks to the efforts to expand facilities. The large emergency Nightingale hospitals mercifully have no new cases to look after.

There is still much to do to cut the death rates further, to limit the spread of the virus and to safeguard those most vulnerable to the severe version of this disease. Thames Valley MPs have a weekly meeting with the Local resilience Forum and with the local police by conference calls to see what needs doing and to tackle Ministers where Central government needs to take action. This week's meetings reported no problems with the supply of protective clothing and equipment, and demonstrated good progress on expanding the number of tests and test centres, including mobile and home testing. I am in regular and varied contact with Ministers as and when an issue arises that needs UK government involvement.

Government did respond when I passed on – as others doubtless did – the danger of letting elderly patients out of hospital and back to care homes without checking they no longer had the virus. This I am assured has now been sorted out. Those Care Homes that do have cases of the virus now need good infection control to stop it spreading throughout their vulnerable residents. Care Homes are often privately owned and run, but are now being offered national, regional and local government assistance with protective clothing and training to limit the continued spread in homes that have cases.

I have also raised the issue of the need for the NHS to resume more of its regular work, which government confirms they are ready to do. The NHS assures us it has very good infection control in general hospitals which undertake a range of work in addition to handling Covid 19 patients. It is important that everyone with a serious condition that could benefit from hospital treatment feels confident to go to hospital to receive it.

I have been critical of the poor quality of the statistics Ministers and the public receive daily to monitor progress and to make decisions about future policy. The estimates of the Transmission rate are very wide – 0.5 to 1.0. This looks at how many people an infected person infects, and needs to be as far below 1 as possible for the disease to wane quickly. The national numbers were not based on testing of a proper sample of the whole population which should give the best figures over time. I am told this is now being remedied. The figures for deaths have been changed several times, with different definitions and standards for registering a death as a Covid 19 death. This means we do not see an accurate plot of true trends in deaths over the last couple of months. The international comparisons are not comparisons as they do not even adjust for size of populations.

I have put this to Ministers and spoken about it in the Commons this week. It matters, because government needs to make decisions to get more people back to work safely, and needs accurate and consistent figures on deaths, transmission rates and hospital use to do so. I have also been working hard on the economic issues of jobs, small business and livelihoods which I will write to you about next week.