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Coronavirus Shielding: Are Patients Voices Being Heard?



2.2 million people have been strongly advised to stay at home by the Government during the coronavirus pandemic – that is around 1 in 420 people, who have been identified as ‘clinically extremely vulnerable’ and therefore are in need of shielding. People who should be shielded are not supposed to leave their homes or gardens, including for exercise, to shopping or to go to work. However, of the 2.2 million quoted, how many of these have been sufficiently informed that they have this status, and all that this implies? Although the Government’s shielding guidance remains just advice, there has been little engagement with Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) to establish the needs of this large number of patients. **In fact, on the 19th March, NHS England stopped all work with PPGs, discontinuing the collating and reporting of patient experience data, as well as delaying responses to complaints and stopping any local meetings of patient groups.**

Ideally, PPGs should be directly involved in decision-making within the NHS. But there are real concerns surrounding the suspension of this vital engagement process, and questions are being raised as to whether patients’ voices are being heard at all during this crisis.

‘Patient engagement’ means involving patients from the outset, as they can provide valuable insights into what is needed both for themselves and their community. Also, without hearing patient voices, do we really know how effective the ‘stay at home’ message has been?

Latest figures released by the Office of National Statistics reveal that that up to half of people who are shielding from Covid-19 have left their home against the Government’s advice - mainly due to the pressures of work and isolation. And worryingly, a third of those shielding said their mental health had worsened during lockdown, especially for those under 60. A fifth had been unable to access certain types of healthcare, such as tests or scans, and a tenth had had no access to care. A fifth also said that their existing condition had got worse in lockdown.

Whilst we navigate our way out of the lockdown, communication is vital in order to make sure that patients’ needs are met. Therefore, more than ever engagement with patients are needed.

On Friday 19th June 2020, On Air Media were joined by Dr Patricia Wilkie, OBE, President of The National Association of Patient Participation (N.A.P.P.), Dr Folarin Majekodunmi, Chairman of N.A.P.P., and Gemma

Jackson, Patient Participation Group (PPG) Chair of Thornton Practice Wyre Lancashire, to discuss the importance of PPGs in supporting patients through this crisis.

You can listen to both the recorded highlights and the Podcast via our YouTube Channel [here](#).

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