

COVID-19 – Mental Health Position Statement



Mental health service closures

Guidance from NHS England^[1] outlines principles for managing capacity and demand within inpatient and community mental health (MH), and learning disability (LD) and autism

Scotland, [National Clinical Guidance](#) outlines what community services should be prioritised and recommends the suspension of key mental health and learning disability services, including new CAMHS and community mental health referrals which are deemed low level. The guidance is not replicated across all areas of the UK.

Members report that services are being suspended or undergoing ad hoc redesign in many places across the UK. As a result of redeployment of staff due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in certain areas staff are being redeployed to cover shortages in physical health or specific Covid-19 based services. This potentially leaves these vulnerable groups without routine planned support at a time in which it is anticipated that anxiety over COVID-19 and restrictions on family support networks will cause an increased need for mental health provision. The COVID-19 outbreak has the potential to result in a severe health impact for recipients of MH, LD and autism services. There will be a need to monitor the impact of services being reduced. As a member of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group, with Public Health England the RCN will be monitoring suicide data and circumstances around these deaths and any links to the COVID-19 situation.

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak will have major implications for all health and care services in the UK, not least for mental health, learning disability and autism services which were already dramatically under-

COVID-19 – Mental Health Position Statement



The RCN is clear that:

- The right to life should be preserved;
-

COVID-19 – Mental Health Position Statement



Civil liberties – detention under mental health legislation

Changes were made to mental health legislation in the UK, early in the presentation of the Covid19 epidemic, this was in part because of a recognition that nurses and psychiatrists particularly would be removed from mental health services to meet demand elsewhere. The RCN wishes to highlight the fact that in a significant number of areas across the UK there have been substantial human resources removed from mental health services, and that in these circumstances this will lead to significant disruption of care.

In order to give health and care workers the flexibility needed to continue treating patients,

In England and Wales; the [Coronavirus Act 2020](#)

- Requires fewer health care professionals to undertake certain functions and extends or removes time limits relating to the detention and transfer of patients. Including:
- Period for which a patient can be detained following report by a medical practitioner increased from 72 to 120 hours
- Period for which a patient can be detained pending report by a registered clinician or practitioner increased from 6 to 12 hours
- Removal of 12-week maximum period of remand to hospital for report on mental condition.
- Period for which a patient can be detained in a place of safety increased from 24 hours to 36 hours.
- relating to the movements of defendants and prisoners between court, prison and hospitals (from 2 to 1)

In Scotland [the Coronavirus Act \(Scotland\)](#) ;

- The maximum period of an emergency detention order has been increased from 72 to 120 hours.
- A second 28 day short term detention certificate can be granted on expiry of the first.
- The

COVID-19 – Mental Health Position Statement

