



Statement on Public Accounts Committee Report 8 July 2020

The Public Accounts Committee published a report on *NHS capital expenditure and financial management* on 8 July. The report states:

'We are extremely concerned by the widely reported shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) faced by NHS and care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.'

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) shares this concern and thinks that the current reported shortages may in fact be just the tip of the iceberg. Various procedures that speech and language therapists undertake are not currently recognised as aerosol generating procedures in current UK Government guidance on PPE.

This is deeply concerning. It puts speech and language therapists and the people they work with and support at a double risk of contracting the virus:

- **Lack of recognition** – given the lack of recognition of our role in UK Government guidance, members are reporting to us that they are struggling to secure access to PPE locally.
- **Shortage of PPE** – even where speech and language therapists are able to access PPE, they may be at risk from any local shortages, shortages that become even greater if the procedures speech and language therapists undertake are recognised in UK Government guidance.

The risk to speech and language therapists and the people they support is very real. Some of our members have reported to us that they have contracted the virus, but have been asymptomatic and, therefore, have not known. In this context, unless speech and language therapists have access to appropriate PPE there is a potential risk to their patients, many of whom may be vulnerable.

In its report, the Public Accounts Committee recommends that:

‘The Department should write to the Committee within two months to clarify its governance arrangements and outline at what point in the future it expects to have a predictable supply of stock and ready access to PPE supply within the NHS and care sectors. This should include detail on the roles and responsibilities for the procurement and distribution of personal protective equipment across NHS and social care settings.’

The RCSLT supports this call. We hope that the Department of Health and Social Care will use the letter to the Committee as an opportunity to indicate what plans the UK Government has to update its guidance on PPE to reflect the aerosol generating procedures that speech and language therapists undertake. That would then help inform a fuller picture of the extent of the shortages of PPE ahead of any second wave.

The evidence base for speech and language therapists undertaking aerosol generating procedures is strong. It is supported by the Intensive Care Society, the National Tracheostomy Safety Project, the British Thoracic Society, ENT-UK, the UK Swallow Research Group, the European Society for Swallowing Disorders, the British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition and the British Association of Stroke Physicians.

The evidence base was sent to the Department of Health and Social Care, and shared with other national partners, on 22 April. We look forward to receiving a response from the Government in due course, including also to our letter of 2 April on the same issue.