



Covid-19: 15 000 deregistered doctors are told, “Your NHS needs you”

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The UK government plans to bring a Coronavirus Bill before parliament with sweeping powers to deal with the covid-19 pandemic, including putting retired doctors and final year medical students to work.

The bill, which is expected to be nodded through the legislature without opposition, will allow ports and airports to be shut and for people to be detained and held in isolation facilities on public health grounds. More than 65 000 doctors and nurses who have retired since 2017 will be asked to take on temporary paid jobs to help fight the virus.

Those who take up the offer will receive a contract reflecting standard terms and conditions such as working hour protections, pay arrangements, and annual leave entitlement. Doctors will be re-registered with the General Medical Council (GMC) and will be covered against clinical negligence claims by the state indemnity scheme.

Letters from the GMC are going out to 15 000 doctors who have left the register or given up their licence to practise within the past three years, have a UK address, are fully qualified and experienced, and are in good standing. Their average age is 53.5 years, and around a third are aged 44 or under.

Unless they opt out they will be given automatic temporary registration without a fee, allowing them to work if they want to. But they will not be required to work and will be able to change their mind at any time.

Similarly, the Nursing and Midwifery Council is writing to more than 50 000 nurses whose registration has lapsed in the past three years.

Those given temporary registration will be surveyed either by telephone, on NHS 111, or face to face regarding the type of

role they could fill and how much time they can give. Former staff will be able to register to select from a range of clinical and non-clinical roles, depending on their skills and time away from practice, and will receive full induction and online training.

Indemnity and pensions

The state backed indemnity scheme will provide cover against clinical negligence liabilities for staff with no existing cover in place. Some doctors’ defence organisations have offered to give retired members free support for other matters that may arise, such as patient complaints, disciplinary disputes, or inquests.

Recently retired NHS staff and social workers will be able to return to work without any negative consequences for their pensions. The rule that currently prevents some NHS staff who return to work after retirement from working more than 16 hours a week will be suspended, along with rules on abatements and drawdown of NHS pensions that apply to some retirees who return to work.

Stephen Powis, national medical director for the NHS, said, “Our hardworking NHS staff are working round the clock to get ready for the peak of the pandemic, and today we are calling on former staff to come back and help us. It is only right we use every means at our disposal to bolster the front line in the face of this unprecedented challenge for the NHS.

“By offering to return to the NHS now, these thousands of well qualified and compassionate people will make more of a difference than ever before, not just to patients but to colleagues and the wider community.”

The bill is time limited for two years. Not all of the powers will come into force at once but will do so only as deemed necessary.