

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD) 44/2020

FOR ACTION

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/Health and Social
Care Board/HSC Trusts/NIAS

Hospices

GP Medical Advisers, Health and Social Care Board

All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward
distribution to practice staff)

OOHs Medical Managers (for onward distribution to staff)

Castle Buildings

Stormont Estate

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 44/2020

Date: 10 June 2020

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

Dear Colleague

We are writing to bring to your attention the Regional Ethics Advice and Support Framework which has recently been approved by Minister Swann and ask that it is circulated within your organisation. It is of particular relevance to your Clinical Ethics Committee, several members of which have been directly involved in its development through the COVID-19 HSC Clinical Ethics Forum.

The Framework has been developed to assist in the resolution of ethical dilemmas in clinical decision making during the COVID-19 pandemic escalation, in particular should situations arise when demand for clinical care would exceed resources available.

The guidance aligns with the work of the UK Medical and Ethical Advisory Group to ensure a coherent approach across the UK. The Forum membership was drawn from a wide range of clinicians from health and social care, representatives from Trust Clinical Ethics Committees, representatives from the Critical Care Network, Palliative Care in Partnership and the Frailty Network as well as a range of lay members including hospital chaplains. The Forum also engaged with a number of interested parties (such as the Patient and Client Council and NIAS) and reference groups (such as Disability Action and the Alzheimer's Society) at different points in the development of the Framework and have subsequently created a structure to support the work of the Forum with ongoing engagement with a wider range of reference groups.

Part 1 of the Framework sets out **ethical principles** in a rights based approach aligned to the adapted guidance from the Committee on Ethical Aspects of Pandemic Influenza 2007, revised 2020 with links to relevant legislation on human rights, disability, equality and consent.

Part 2 of the Framework sets out **Practical Guidance** that considers a range of issues and settings such as advance care planning, DNACPR, access to critical care, care homes, end of life, visiting and mental health (this will be a live document that this updated as new information becomes available).

A plain English version of Part 1 of the Framework is in preparation and should be available by the end of June. At the suggestion of the reference groups we have also commissioned an 'Easy Read' version which will also be available then. At that time we hope to have a more public launch of the Framework when these more accessible documents are available.

We believe that the Framework will be of great use to staff engaged in decision making at these challenging times and thank you for your support for the Forum and its ongoing work to support ethical decision making.

Yours sincerely



DR MICHAEL McBRIDE
Chief Medical Officer

MRS CHARLOTTE McARDLE
Chief Nursing Officer

MR SEAN HOLLAND
Chief Social Work Officer

Circulation List

Director of Public Health/Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)

Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency

Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency

Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, Health and Social Care Board (*for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies*)

Directors of Pharmacy HSC Trusts

Director of Social Care and Children, HSCB

Family Practitioner Service Leads, Health and Social Care Board (*for cascade to GP Out of Hours services*)

Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Consultants, Occupational Health Physicians and School Medical Leads*)

Nursing Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Community Nurses, and Midwives*)

Directors of Children's Services, HSC Trusts

RQIA (*for onward transmission to all independent providers including independent hospitals*)

Medicines Management Pharmacists, HSC Board (*for cascade to prescribing advisers*)

Regional Medicines Information Service, Belfast HSC Trust

Regional Pharmaceutical Procurement Service, Northern HSC Trust

Professor Donna Fitzsimons, Head of School of Nursing and Midwifery QUB
Professor Sonja McIlpatrick, Head of School of Nursing, University of Ulster
Caroline Lee, CEC
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Professor Paul McCarron, Head of School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical
Sciences, UU
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Development, QUB
Joe Brogan, Assistant Director of Integrated Care, HSCB
Michael Donaldson, HSCB (*for distribution to all General Dental Practitioners*)
Raymond Curran, Head of Ophthalmic Services, HSCB (*for distribution to
Community Optometrists*)
Trade Union Side

This letter is available on the Department of Health website at
[https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-
advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications)