Equality Considerations Covid-19

Summary

This report considers the potential impacts in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion of Covid-19. It is now widely known that the pandemic has produced and exacerbated inequalities for different groups. On 2 June, 2020 Public Health England produced the report COVID-19: review of disparities in risks and outcomes which looks into how different factors have affected COVID-19 risk and outcomes.

This report aims to provide context to inform equality analysis and related activities within St George's.

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 protects the rights of individuals with certain protected characteristics and sets out which behaviours are unlawful. The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

The 9 protected characteristics recognised by the Equality Act 2010 are:

- ❖ Sex
- ❖ Disability
- ❖ Race
- ❖ Sexual Orientation
- ❖ Religion & Belief
- ❖ Pregnancy & Maternity
- ❖ Age
- ❖ Marriage & Civil Partnerships
- ❖ Gender Reassignment

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) places a statutory obligation on public sector organisations to pay 'due regard' to equality in all of their policies, practices and procedures. This means public bodies must:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Equality Analysis

Equality Analysis is a means through which we can examine and analyse the decisions we make to determine what the impact will be on different groups and individuals. This enables us to ensure that no individuals or groups will be disadvantaged by these decisions as a result of their personal characteristics.

In our decision making, we need to recognise that our staff and students from particular groups may face specific barriers and challenges and we have a duty to address these. Covid-19 has had a range of impacts on our staff and student communities and this must be considered in our planning and activity going forwards.

For more information on equality analysis, see webpage and guidance document.

Covid-19 impact on protected characteristics:

These characteristics and related impacts should be considered in relation to one another to enable a full analysis of impact and risk.

Age

- Older people (50+) are more likely to contract Covid-19 and are subsequently more likely to experience symptoms and may take longer to recover. This may have impacts on sick leave, to work and returning to site. Individuals may experience anxieties relating to these risks.

- The intersection of age and existing health conditions may require individuals to shield during this time. This may cause feelings of anxiety and isolation and may also create practical difficulties for those living alone or without support e.g. food shopping.

- Younger people are more likely to be living in house-shares or larger groups where they may not necessarily know those that they live with well. They may also be less able to set up a suitable home working space where they live in shared accommodation or small spaces. This may affect work productivity, access and meeting availability as well as mental wellbeing.

- Confidence and prior knowledge of using certain technologies may vary depending on age, for example using video-conferencing software. With the increased use of new software and changes in working methods, additional guidance may be needed.

Disability

- During the Covid-19 lockdown measures, individuals with disabilities and/or long-term health conditions will have had less access to regular support services, NHS appointments and related care, these may have moved online or become less frequent. This may have impacted on their health and wellbeing and subsequently their ability to work or study.

- Individuals who have a disability or long-term health condition that makes them more vulnerable to Covid-19 may be shielding or isolating. This may affect their ability to

work or study, as well as possibly increasing feelings of isolation and anxiety. This may also create practical difficulties for those living alone or without support e.g. food shopping.

- Individuals with mental health conditions may experience triggers and an increase in symptoms due to Covid-19. Individuals may develop mental health conditions during this time. Support services and appointments may be impacted and support may be offered in different, perhaps more limited, capacities. Individuals may need to take time away from work or study to manage their mental health conditions.

- For individuals who have reasonable adjustments in place, these must continue to be provided throughout the change in working environments and may need to be amended or enhanced with home working. These adjustments should be reviewed and discussed where any major changes occur, for example returning to site

- For those who have conditions which can make change more difficult, for example those with anxiety disorders and those with autism (which includes Asperger's), the move to working remotely may be more challenging. This should be considered by managers and tutors and appropriate support given. Where additional change is planned, such as a return to site, these groups must be considered and consulted.

- Staff and students who may have existing mental health conditions or disabilities which they have not shared with their manager, may feel forced to do so, particularly where conditions and symptoms are exacerbated by Covid-19 and related issues, such as lockdown, home working or returning to site. Furthermore, staff and students may develop conditions during this time and may not know how to disclose or what support is available to them.

- Those who are parents, carers or guardians of someone with a disability or with special educational needs (SEN) will likely have had to provide increased care during this time with schools and support services being closed or limited. This will have an impact on ability to work or study as well as potential impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

- Some staff and students may find working exclusively online more challenging e.g. those who are neurodivergent, visually impaired and Deaf or hearing impaired.

- Following social distancing requirements, changes are being made to work and study spaces. For those with physical disabilities, visual impairments or who are neurodivergent, these adjustments may be challenging. Individuals may have anxieties about what to expect and may also face barriers where changes have been implemented without consideration of these groups' needs.

Race and ethnicity

- Evidence has shown that individuals from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are being impacted by Covid-19 at a higher rate than those from white backgrounds. On 16 June 2020, Public Health England produced the report Understanding the Impact of Covid-19 on BAME groups. This report found:
  - People of Bangladeshi ethnicity had around twice the risk of death when compared to people of White British ethnicity.

- People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Other Asian, Caribbean and Other Black ethnicity had between 10 and 50% higher risk of death when compared to White British (1).

These disparities were not created by Covid-19, rather Covid-19 has exacerbated longstanding inequalities affecting BAME groups in the UK. The reality of these disparities may naturally cause staff and students who are black, Asian or from another minority ethnic group to feel anxious about returning to site. Furthermore, the mortality rates may have an impact on mental wellbeing and ability to engage in work and study.

- Since the outbreak of Covid-19, there has been a rise in hate crime towards south and east Asian people both online and off-line. These incidents may impact individuals' safety and mental health which may subsequently impact work and study.

- Working or studying from home may be more challenging for those who live in larger, mutigenerational households. Data shows that black, Asian and minority ethnic families are more likely to live in multigenerational households than white families; 30% of Bangladeshi families, 16% of Pakistani and 15% of Black African families live in housing that is considered to be overcrowded, versus only 2% of white British families (2). This is particularly important in relation to childcare whilst nurseries and schools are closed and in relation to caring for older relatives who may be vulnerable or shielding. This may also impact on staff and students' ability to set up a suitable working environment.

- It is well known that racism and xenophobia occur increasingly via online platforms. With the move to increased online working, incidents of online abuse may also increase, particularly with anonymity.

- Black pregnant women are eight times more likely to be admitted to hospital with COVID-19, while Asian women are four times as likely. Women from ethnic minority backgrounds have long been known to face additional maternity risks, with maternal mortality rates significantly higher than for white women (3). This finding may impact on black, Asian and ethnic minority pregnant women experiencing higher anxiety relating to exposure to Covid-19.

Sex

- Data from Public Health England's 'Disparities in the Risk and Outcomes of COVID-19' report found that diagnosis rates for Covid-19 are higher among females under 60, and higher among males over 60. Despite making up 46% of diagnosed cases, men make up almost 60% of deaths from COVID-19 and 70% of admissions to intensive care units (4).

- During the lockdown measures related to Covid-19, schools and nurseries have remained closed for children, unless their parent(s)/guardian(s) are key workers. This has required full-time childcare to be provided at home, whilst parents/guardians are working. This will be most acutely felt by lone parents.

- Evidence shows that the majority of this childcare work is done by women, in addition to other household work (5). This will have significant impacts on ability to work as normal. This may also have longer-term impacts on career progression.

- Evidence shows that the impact of managing childcare at home has resulted in women producing less research outputs than men during the time of Covid-19 (6). This may have a longer-term impact on career progression and may have particular disadvantages for female early career academics.

- Recent data shows increased rates of domestic violence during lockdown. Unsafe living environments severely impact on ability to study and work. Use of women's domestic violence services suggest an increase in domestic abuse following COVID-19 (7).

LGBT+

- Trans people who are in the process of transitioning may experience delays in their medical treatments. This can severely impact on mental health and wellbeing.

- Due to the social distancing and lockdown measures, some LGBT+ individuals may have to return to or remain in homes where they are not accepted, which are homophobic or transphobic and may also be abusive. This is likely to severely impact on mental health and wellbeing and also safety.

- LGBT+ support services may be closed or limited during this time, meaning that LGBT+ individuals are without vital support. This may have significant impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

Religion and belief

- Religious places of worship have been closed during the lockdown which will have an impact on how individuals are able to worship and practice their faith. This also includes the Multi Faith room at St George's.

- The social distancing measures of Covid-19 have also meant funerals cannot take place as usual. This means families and individuals may not be able to perform traditions or rituals as they would normally. This could exacerbate the impact and experience of bereavement.

- Significant religious events and festivals such as Passover, Easter, Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and Christmas will be impacted by social distancing and closure of places of worship meaning individuals, families and communities will be unable to observe these occasions and practice traditions as usual.

Pregnancy, maternity

- Pregnant people are listed as at risk from Covid-19, this may result in shielding or limited movement outside of the home. This may cause anxiety and feelings of isolation as well as posing practical difficulties for those living alone or without support e.g. food shopping.

- During this time, support for those who are pregnant or new parents will likely have decreased. For example, due to social distancing measures, family and friends will not have been able to offer support in ways that they would usually. Furthermore, health and support services, such as NCT anti-natal groups may be impacted. This

may cause feelings of isolation and anxiety. This will be felt most acutely by lone parents.

- For those returning from parental leave during this time, the adjustment to new ways of working may be challenging and unfamiliar. Furthermore, for those working from home with newly born babies, including partners of mothers, this may be particularly challenging.

- Dependent on role and situation, those scheduled for or who are on parental leave, may wish to make changes to their plans.

Parents, guardians and carers

- During the lockdown measures related to Covid-19, schools and nurseries have remained closed for children, unless their parent(s), guardian(s) or carer(s) are key workers. This has required full-time childcare to be provided at home, whilst parents, guardians and carers are working. As mentioned above, this care is usually provided by women. This will have significant impacts on ability to work as normal and may require individuals to work more flexibly and outside of core hours. This will have most significant impact on lone parents, guardians and carers and those with children who have special educational needs (SEN) such as Autism, long-term health conditions or other disabilities.

- According to the Office for National Statistics, there is a growing proportion of adults who are caring for their older relatives at the same time as their young children. This is due to the combination of an ageing population and people having children at a later age. Findings have shown that those in this position experience poorer mental health (8). These responsibilities and the impact of them will most likely have been exacerbated by Covid-19.

- For those who have recently adopted a child, this transition may well have been impacted by Covid-19, creating specific challenges. Adoption UK found that over half of adoptive families reported that their children were experiencing increased anxiety and emotional distress during the first month of lockdown (9).

- Those who are parents, guardians or carers of children with special educational needs (SEN) are protected by association to Disability under the Equality Act 2010. The caring needs here may impact on individuals' ability to work or study. This may also have an impact on wellbeing and mental health.

- Those who are parents, guardians or carers and are required to complete research may experience challenges in completing this research. They may be less likely to submit publications or papers. As mentioned above, this has found to be particularly true for female academics.

- As mentioned above, Black pregnant women are eight times more likely to be admitted to hospital with COVID-19, while Asian women are four times as likely. This may lead to increased anxiety among pregnant women from Black and Asian backgrounds who may require additional support during this time.

Socio-economic factors

- Individuals in lower socio-economic groups are more likely to be engaged in roles which are in lower grades and may require them to be on-site, e.g. cleaners and security staff. Individuals in such roles may experience increased anxiety relating to exposure to Covid-19 as well as in relation to the potential impact on job security.

- Many staff in lower grade roles may have been furloughed under the Government Job Retention Scheme. All individuals will experience being on furlough differently, however it may cause increased anxieties relating to job security as well as affecting wellbeing and mental health. Staff on furlough may experience increased isolation, particularly where they live alone or away from friends and family.

- Individuals in shared housing and/or rental accommodation may face challenges and uncertainties during this time. They may not be able to set up a suitable space to work or study, may not have adequate Wi-Fi provision and may even have to move accommodation without choice, for example where tenancy contract comes to an end.

Additional factors

- For those who are estranged from their family, this period may be particularly difficult. Individuals may experience triggers, mental health and wellbeing difficulties and increased feelings of anxiety and isolation.

- For individuals who have family based outside of the UK, or who are from outside the UK, the restrictions on travel as well as the differences in approaches to and experiences of Covid-19 across the globe may cause anxieties. Individuals will be unable to return to or visit their country of origin and may not be in regular contact with family and friends. This may also cause increased feelings of isolation and worry.

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