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| Our Ref:   WD/RR    *When telephoning please ask for: Willie Duffy* | unisoncol  UNISON House  14 West Campbell Street  GLASGOW G2 6RX    Tel: 0141 342 2899  www.unison-scotland.org.uk |
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| 12 June 2020  Jeane Freeman  Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport  The Scottish Government  St Andrews House  Regent Road  EDINBURGH EH1 3DG |

Dear Cabinet Secretary

**TESTING**

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the range of issue we brought to you on our call last week and for your commitment to continue the engagement with UNISON on issues that affect our members in health and social care.

We are keen to further discuss the concerns we raised with you and your officials around the lack of a coherent testing strategy which, should be a key principle to combating and controlling Covid 19.

Whilst we very much welcome your intervention on one of the most pressing challenges faced by our members within the care home environment by ensuring staff are able to follow guidance to self-isolate when symptomatic or following a positive test will now receive full pay. However, I would draw to your attention your intervention is not being universally applied and there is a need to monitor the closely the application through the commissioners within IJBs.

In recent weeks the Scottish Government has issued a number of policy directives, guidance and plans in the area of testing which, may well be necessary but have not been linked with a strategy to deliver on the policy objectives, in truth this has not been helpful. There is we believe a hugely confused landscape where policy needs to be linked to a clearly defined strategy that brings clarity for health boards in execution and delivery.

As an example, there is increasing confusion and misunderstanding in the service regarding the policy to screen all asymptomatic and potentially pre-symptomatic staff in care homes only on a weekly basis, if there is clinical evidence this policy intervention will bring benefit why only care home staff and not the entirety of health and social care workforce? We have concerns that targeting only care home staff is a politically rather than clinically driven decision.

The lack of strategic direction has meant that boards have introduced their own policy around clinical priority and effectiveness in order to manage a level of control.

We are happy to continue this conversation with you in an attempt to develop a testing strategy that brings together the numerous policy initiatives on:

* Acute Hospital Admissions
* Acute Hospital Discharges
* Hospital Patients over 70
* Care Homes, residents and staff testing both symptomatic and asymptomatic
* Care Home Outbreaks
* Care Home Sampling
* Test Trace and Isolate (Test and Protect)

We recognise that this is only one part of the Scottish Governments pathway on combating Covid 19 but if we do not address the misunderstanding and confusion that exists by producing a coherent strategy we will not succeed in the goal to protect the communities we serve.

It is vital that we continue to work in partnership with you and your officials to combat this virus, in order that the health and social care workforce can deliver on the testing policy, guidance and plans we require clarity of vision through a joined up approach within a coherent strategy.

Regards

Yours sincerely

*Willie Duffy*

**WILLIE DUFFY**

**Head of UNISON Health Scotland**