Dear colleague

INDEPENDENT HEALTH AND DENTAL CARE:
THE PROGRESSIVE LIFTING OF COVID 19 RESTRICTIONS

As all parts of Scotland will be classed as Level 3 (or below) on Monday 26 April and as we progress down through the Levels, when the data tells us that it is safe to do so, we write to remind you of what this means for independent providers registered with, and regulated by, Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

Levels 3 and below

You can offer a range of treatments and procedures from your premises. However, it is important to note that this is a progressive lifting of restrictions and must not be seen as a return to unrestricted service provision. In Level 3 we therefore suggest that the focus should begin with the provision of treatment that is comparable with healthcare provided by the NHS and/or meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Is essential or urgent.
- Follows up on a previous treatment.
- Completes a course of treatment that was started before the requirement to close.
- Addresses a negative impact on the patient or client due to a delay in treatment provision.

As we progressively move down through the Levels or you have dealt with patients with essential or urgent medical needs or are ‘at risk’ you will gradually be able to recommence elective procedures; regular preventative healthcare check-ups; and screening etc., with the ultimate goal of being able to offer a full range of treatments and procedures.

To achieve this you must, of course, continue to fully adhere to all public health advice, in particular as regards to social distancing and the use of PPE and face coverings.

The Healthcare Improvement Scotland website provides guidance and details the policies, procedures and practices you must have in place before restarting your services.
Face Coverings, PPE Physical Distancing and Hygiene

You are reminded that the safety and protection of patients, clients and staff takes primacy, regardless of the Level placed on the area in which your independent healthcare facility is situated, or the services you provide. As a healthcare professional you are fully aware that the use of face coverings, physical distancing and hand hygiene remain key tools in breaking the chain of COVID transmission. You must continue to recognise this in moving forward and ensure that your staff and clients/patients are in no doubt of their responsibilities in this regard.

If you need to ask a patient to remove a face covering, **and this should be the exception unless it is for dental treatment**, it should be for the shortest period possible. It is also essential that the PPE used provides protection for both the practitioner and the patient.

Face coverings should not be removed unless there are sound clinical reasons to do so. As a healthcare professional you have a duty to consider the public health implications along with the risks and benefits of providing the treatment, which should be documented in the patient’s or client’s care record. This is particularly important when your premises are located in an area that is classified as Level 3 or above. Comprehensive and up-to-date guidance on the provision of safe health and dental care to protect against the spread of COVID-19 is available on the HPS website and the Scottish Dental Clinical Effectiveness Programme website.

**Level 4**

You should note that in the unfortunate event that certain areas need to return to Level 4, by statute, independent healthcare providers situated in those areas must close, unless they are providing medical or surgical assistance that is comparable to healthcare provided by the NHS. **The regulations are explicit that this does not include cosmetic or aesthetic procedures such as the injection or implantation into or under the skin of a substance for cosmetic purposes, or electrolysis.**

**Travel**

You must remain aware of any travel restrictions that may apply in your area if it moves into a higher Level in the future, and the implications on travel for treatment. General travel guidance is available at: Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on travel and transport - gov.scot (www.gov.scot). The enforcement of travel restrictions and public health safety measures, as set out in legislation, is a matter for the police and local authority environmental health officers.

**Conclusion**

We are winning the battle against COVID by vaccination and testing, and know that many of you are involved in supporting the NHS to carry out this essential work. The co-operation of the public and business has also been instrumental in containing the virus. However, the gains have come at considerable cost in terms of the health and wellbeing of our citizens, loss of income and the economy.

As we begin to further ease restrictions we must not become complacent, but must remain vigilant to COVID spikes and new strains of the virus if we are to return to the sustained level of normality that we all want, without the need for further lockdowns and the severe damage they cause on several fronts. We look to you for your continuing co-operation to help make this happen.
Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR JASON LEITCH

Yours sincerely

TOM FERRIS