



All Party Parliamentary Group WHISTLEBLOWING

JULY EDITION



**Chair
Mary Robinson
MP**

An All Party Parliamentary Group update

As we start to emerge from the lockdown the importance of whistleblowing in the prevention of crime and wrongdoing and as an early alert to serious issues will remain a focus for my committee. Myself and my team have been very busy as I hope you will have seen in the press, taking every opportunity to ensure that whistleblowing is recognised as a positive, important and a natural activity in a healthy society. We have commenced our second call to evidence conducting our first session with former police officers and police whistleblowers where we were joined by a senior member of the Home Secretaries team Mike Wood MP. This was a very engaging and moving session helping us get further into the detail of why current legislation has failed to live up to expectation. My thanks to those who took part for their honesty and openness. This week we will be meeting doctors and moving forward we will be inviting representatives across other sectors to hear their experience and assessment of PIDA and their proposals for improvements. My team will be publishing a series of short reports to include evidence gathered from these sessions and will be launching a new survey shortly...

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The committee has now extended our call to evidence to the regulators, trade union and other representative bodies, we will be hearing from as many as possible over the coming months. The evidence from these meetings will form the basis of the second in our planned series of reports following, "Whistleblowing - The personal cost of doing the right thing and the cost to society of ignoring it". We are delighted to have received feedback from leading academics on the APPG's recommendations and will be incorporating this into our ongoing work and posting it as a resource for others. In Parliament we are engaging with colleagues to help us progress the Bill for the Office of the Whistleblower and look forward to meeting with BEIS and other ministers. As part of this engagement we have been asking Parliamentary Questions and supporting colleagues who receive enquiries from whistleblowers about both whistleblowing matters and our work. We are pleased to find that support for the APPG is growing and that awareness of the importance of whistleblowing and the need to find better ways to protect whistleblowers is coming to the fore in the aftermath of the Covid crisis.

"While it will not be possible to meet with every whistleblower or group who would like to give evidence I would like to invite you to provide evidence or opinion on our proposals for the future of whistleblowing to the APPG via the secretariat. "

I will end this as I started by paying tribute to the APPG team and thank everyone who has contacted us, given evidence and the secretariat. I look forward to sharing an update again next month and hope that you will all continue to keep safe.

Visit: WWW.APPGWhistleblowing.co.uk for live updates of the work of the APPG



"Putting whistleblower protection at the top of the agenda"

Susan Kramer & Steven Kern

All Party Parliamentary Group on Whistleblowing

A top-down photograph of a wooden table. In the upper left, a white ceramic cup filled with dark coffee sits on a saucer. Below it, a white smartphone is lying flat. In the upper right, several green leaves are scattered. The background is a warm-toned wooden surface with visible grain.

APPG IN THE NEWS

Here's an insight into what we have been doing in the media this month

BBC Newsnight

Our very own Chair, Mary Robinson and Director of Strategy and Policy, Georgina Halford-Hall spoke to BBC about the issues surrounding PPE and the general treatment of Whistleblowers during Covid19 outbreak.

“Those who have been speaking out have then received a reprimand or they’ve had a warning... that their contracts are likely not to be replaced.”

ITV News

The team discussed the emerging issue of Furlough Fraud where an estimated 4,500 complaints whistleblower complaints have been made as bosses force furloughed staff to work.

Forbes

Forbes interviewed Baroness Kramer and Georgina Halford-Hall about the need for the Office for the Whistleblower properly to support whistleblowers.

“Baroness Kramer, says that legislation is in the works to create The Office of the Whistleblower, and the early stage proposals have broad support across the political spectrum.”

And also that despite the U.K.’s 1998 legislation, “we really haven’t managed to clamp down on retaliation against whistleblowers.” Adding, “So often a whistleblower ends up in an employment tribunal, which was never the issue. The issue was never—were they [a] good or bad employee?” But rather, “Has the issue they’ve been talking about actually been investigated?”

Visit:

www.appgwhistleblowing.co.uk/appg-in-the-media

for the full stories and for more APPG News.

ARUN BAKSI

PERSONAL PROTECTION EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Establishing the truth

The government have repeatedly stated that there was enough PPE in stock, but the experience of front-line staff tell us a different story. As of 28th April, the government confirmed 49 deaths of NHS staff although the Guardian and BMA suggest around 100.

A BMA survey in April this year received 2000 responses that revealed that many doctors were still expected to care for COVID 19 patients with little or no PPE. More than half the doctors working in high risk environments reported there were either shortage or no supply at all of adequate masks, 65% said they did not have access to eye protection. More significantly, 55% of doctors felt pressurised to work in high risk areas in the absence of adequate PPE.

Public Health England (PHE) have made revised guidelines which differ considerably from the standards set by other countries or the World Health Organisation (WHO). One has the impression that PHE sets standards according to what is convenient rather than for the protection of staff. WHO recommends medical face masks, long sleeved gowns and goggles and gloves but PHE insists on surgical masks, plastic aprons (arms bare below the elbow) and gloves in most areas although it sets higher standards for very high risk areas.

Respiratory droplets greater than 5um fall to the ground rapidly within one meter from the source. Droplets from aerosols less than 5um remain suspended in the air for a prolonged period. Coughing and sneezing, two common features of COVID 19 symptoms produce both droplets and aerosols. Surgical masks are inadequate to protect the wearer from inhaling particles smaller than 100um (droplets and aerosols). PPF2 masks have 94% efficiency compared to 99% for FFP3.

The government calls attention to the global demand for PPE as a reason to explain the shortage of PPE. This does not hold water. In March NHS officials informed Parliament that there was adequate supply of PPE to keep staff safe in the months ahead. In February, the Department of Health and Social Care sent a letter to NHS suppliers downgrading the risks of COVID 19 despite the fact that WHO had declared it as a public health emergency.

A recent paper by Thomas, JP et al in Clinical Medicine stated that PHE guidance on PPE appeared complex and convoluted. It concluded that concerns regarding the current PHE COVID 19 PPE advice remain warranted. It called for an urgent revision of the guidelines to ensure sufficient protection of NHS workforce.

References:

1. The Guardian 28th April 2020

2. BMA survey of doctors, 7th April 2020

3. Thomas, JP et al: Evaluating the national PPE guidance for NHS healthcare workers during the COVID 19 pandemic. Clinical Medicine 2020. Vol20. No3: 242-7

4. Privatised and Unprepared: The NHS Supply Chain

<https://weownit.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Privatised%20and%20Unprepared%20-%20The%20NHS%20Supply%20Chain%20Final.pdf>

APPG IN ACTION

We have been working hard through these strange times to gain traction in our work and bring whistleblowing issues and proposed solutions to Parliament.

This month we have been focusing on:



APPG writes to Health and Social Care Secretary Matthew Hancock

This month, the APPG wrote to Matthew Hancock, Health and Social Care secretary, about concerns regarding transparency and accountability including cases highlighting the avoidance of scrutiny by attempts to silence those raising concerns about Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

We eagerly await his response.

For a full copy - visit our website:
appgwhistleblowing.co.uk/publications

APPG Call to Evidence in partnership
with Coventry University.



This month we will be looking to publish our call to evidence for whistleblowers in partnership with University of Coventry. We have been working closely with Panos [Surname, [Title]]. We seek to investigate [Title of Questionnaire], gathering this pool of information will aid us in the development of our second report providing a hollistic view of what whistleblowing in the UK actually looks like across genders, ethnicities and social classes.

To participate - visit our website:
appgwhistleblowing.co.uk for more information



APPG WHISTLEBLOWING

Parliamentary Questions

May-June Questions



This Month's Parliamentary Questions

This month, we posed several questions to Parliament regarding the PPE crisis amidst the Coronavirus pandemic and have sought clarification as to the steps taken to manage the crisis and protect those in vulnerable positions.

As well as posing questions to Parliament, we have written directly to the Prime Minister and the Health and Social Care secretary.

Here are some of the questions we have posed:

"When we are faced with a national health emergency and a shortage of trained medical staff does the (Secretary of State/Minister) think that NHS management are acting appropriately in dismissing frontline doctors and nurses for exposing safety issues - most particularly the shortage of PPE?"

"What steps are being taken to ensure that NHS frontline staff are not going to suffer detriment for reporting safety issues - that is to say "whistleblowing?"

"Does the (Secretary of State/Minister) agree that in a time of national health emergency it is more important than ever that NHS frontline staff should be able to make protected disclosures without fear of retribution?"

"What steps are being taken to reinforce the protection of NHS frontline whistleblowers against management retribution when they expose safety issues?"

As well as posing these questions to the Commons, we have written directly to MPs.

See www.APPGWhistleblowing.co.uk/Publications to see our letters to MPs.