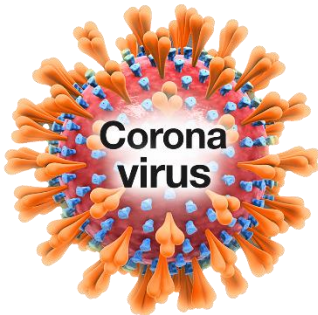


British Medical Association (BMA) BMA Document about Covid-19 and Ethics



The British Medical Association (BMA) is the national organisation that represents doctors.



They have written a paper about what doctors should do if there are more people with Covid-19 than they can treat.



This might mean doctors making decision about who does not get treatment because there are not enough staff or beds.

Decisions like this are called 'ethical' decisions.



Learning Disability England thinks the BMA document could discriminate against disabled people.



So, we have written to them to ask them to change it.

This is what we said to them.



We understand the NHS is under a lot of pressure at the moment.



We understand this means that doctors might have to make decisions about who does get treatment and who does not get treatment.



But we think the BMA document discriminates against disabled people.

The document has two sets of principles:



1. “Everyone matters and everyone matters equally” – we agree with this



2. Health staff should “deliver the greatest medical benefit to the greatest number of people”.



The second principle suggests that people who take more time to treat may not get the treatment they need.

Some disabled people need more time when being treated because of their disability. For example, it might take more time to communicate with someone with a learning disability.



The law expects the NHS to do things differently so that disabled people get good quality healthcare. This is called “making reasonable adjustments”.



The BMA document does not include that the law expects doctors and the NHS to make reasonable adjustments.



For example, taking more time would be a reasonable adjustment.



The BMA document does say doctors cannot discriminate against someone because they have a disability.



But it then says that if someone with Covid-19 has another problem as well, that might be a reason not to treat them – because it will take more time.
(This is called “co-morbidity”)



We are worried that some doctors will think that having a learning disability is a ‘co-morbidity’ and is a reason not to treat someone. This would be wrong.



The NHS has a legal duty to promote equality. This means that if someone with a learning disability needs a bit more time and effort, the NHS has to do that.



We know a lot of people with learning disabilities have poor health because the NHS has not treated them properly in the past.



It would be wrong if the NHS stopped making extra effort to treat people with learning disabilities now – when they need healthcare more than ever.



LDE knows that Covid-19 is making life very difficult for the NHS. We have huge respect for all NHS staff.



We know that, over the next few weeks, some people might not get all the treatment they need because so many people are ill.



But, none of that is an excuse to discriminate against disabled people. This document might give people an excuse to do that.



We ask the BMA to change three things in their Guidance note.



Start by reminding doctors they have to respect people's human rights and legal rights



Make a statement about how doctors and the NHS must continue to make 'reasonable adjustments' to allow for different disabled people



Be clear that it **is** OK to decide to treat a person who might take longer to treat than other people – where that is because it is a reasonable adjustment because a person has a disability.



Learning Disability England

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