



Association for  
Palliative Medicine

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## Statement to Promote the Role of Senior Palliative Medics within the Palliative Care Multi-Professional Team

By way of this statement, the Association for Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland (APM) confirms and entirely endorses that senior medical input is indispensable for all specialist palliative care teams, in hospitals, hospices and community settings. Senior palliative medical personnel include Consultants, Associate Specialists (AS) and the new specialist grade specialty (SGS) doctors.

The COVID 19 pandemic has highlighted the essential role of specialist palliative care across all settings in treating and caring for dying patients and those close to them. The economic impact of the pandemic has meant budgets across departments are being re-examined for areas of cost savings, with high cost groups of staff in hospices and non-income generating services in hospitals under particular scrutiny. Many hospice and community teams have been heavily financially disadvantaged by the loss of fundraising revenue brought on by the lockdown. This may be their main source of income.

We are concerned that Consultant, AS and SGS posts in Palliative Medicine are under threat as executive teams contemplate whether the same level of expertise, knowledge and service delivery can be carried out by a different skill mix. We believe this would be a retrograde move with a negative impact on the quality and calibre of care and is not supported by 2016 NHSE Specialist Palliative Care Information for commissioners and the Royal College of Physicians Palliative Medicine workforce design recommendations, both of which identify Consultants in Palliative Medicine as key members of the **specialist** palliative care multidisciplinary team.

Consultants, AS and SGS doctors in Palliative Medicine hold broad roles with overlap in their skill sets with other senior clinical leaders especially around strategic leadership. We recognise that high quality and effective specialist palliative care relies on the valuable and varied skills of the multidisciplinary team. Uniquely Consultants, AS and SGS doctors in Palliative Medicine are experts, applying their extensive biomedical and pharmacological knowledge to the understanding of pathological disease processes and assessment and management of complex symptomology in patients with life-limiting illnesses. This includes prescribing in complex physiological states and outside drug licences where appropriate. Within the multidisciplinary team, Consultants, AS and SGS doctors in Palliative Medicine take responsibility for difficult clinical decision-making, often in ethically challenging situations and are a resource supporting complex decision making for primary, secondary and tertiary care colleagues.

Consultants, AS and SGS doctors in Palliative Medicine play an essential role in developing the current and future workforce to meet the expanding need for, and scope of palliative care. This is done through participation in education and training across medical specialties and other professional groups supporting and enabling career progression of these staff.

We are aware that across the country approximately 10% of consultant posts in Palliative Medicine are unfilled (increasing to 20% in some geographical areas) and recruitment issues may influence the redesign of service models. The APM is advocating for an expansion in training numbers to meet this demand. Looking to the future, there is an ageing and growing population in the UK. As a consequence of this, many hospitals,

hospices and community teams will see a rise in referral numbers and an increase in clinical complexity of patients with multiple comorbidities.

Consultants, AS and SGS doctors in Palliative Medicine are essential members of the multi-professional palliative care team. The APM reaffirms the view of NHSE and the RCP that the medical lead role cannot be replaced by other professional groups or non-specialist grades. The APM strongly recommends commissioners and executive teams explore the expansion of Consultant in Palliative Medicine posts despite budget pressures and actively resist any reduction which would undermine the quality of the service to patients and those close to them.

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**Clinical Quality Committee**

The Association of Palliative medicine of Great Britain and Ireland