

3rd April, 2020

Sir Simon Stevens
NHS Chief Executive Officer
NHS England
Skipton House,
80 London Road,
London,
SE1 6LH.

Dear Sir Simon Stevens

The Sikh Council UK is the largest platform for Sikhs in the UK. We are recognized as the national advocate for Sikhs in the UK.

It has come to our attention, that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, NHS Trusts around the United Kingdom will be carrying out 'fit tests' in which certain medical staff could be asked to

It is one of the fundamental tenets for a practicing (Amritdhari) Sikh to NOT cut any bodily hair for it is as the great Creator has made us. As such, the person who has chosen the Sikh orthodox route in life means he/she has made a solemn promise in a formal religious ceremony to the Guru to maintain a strict code of conduct. Hence, we are concerned that Sikh staff members (both male and female) being asked to remove their beard or facial hair will be negatively affected by the NHS "Fit Test" as such. This also applies to Sikh patients in relation to having facial hair removed whilst undergoing treatment.

For Sikhs, their duty of care is intrinsically interlinked with their faith. Therefore, we ask that no Sikh healthcare professional is forcibly made to choose between breaking their faith or breaking their front line NHS role to help patients. This would also be in breach of the Equality Act 2010.

We have consulted with Sikh and non-Sikh Professionals and Healthcare workers on this issue. As a result of which, we have been advised that Powdered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPRs) or Controlled Air Purifying Respirators (CAPRs) are alternatives providing an equivalent protection factor to FFP3. Healthcare professionals that fail the 'fit-test' for the FFP3 Masks because of their facial anatomy or facial hair are able to work with COVID-19 patients if they are provided with this alternative personal protective equipment (PPE).

As we mentioned previously, for Sikh healthcare professionals, their faith and professional duty are intrinsically interlinked. Many Sikhs working in the NHS have expressed their strong desire to continue to use their skills and experience working alongside their colleagues in the NHS during this critical time. It is unfair to ask them

to choose between their faith and their vocation when alternative solutions are available.

Therefore we urge NHS trusts to make the necessary reasonable adjustments/provisions (as provided for in the Equality Act 2010) for all those individuals that require alternatives because of their faith or otherwise. This includes both those working in the NHS as well as patients.

We continue to be thankful and fully supportive of our NHS. We have continuously urged Gurdwaras and Sikh organisations to support and provide meals to hospitals, healthcare staff and the wider community.

Yours sincerely,

Jatinder Singh
Secretary General Sikh Council