

Coronavirus – messages from today's update

There are 197 patients with coronavirus in Intensive Care Units in Scotland, and 220 patients have already died. This is an increase of 2 since yesterday, but the First Minister cautioned against a straightforward arithmetical calculation owing to the new way of [reporting](#) these numbers.

Following the revelations in The Scottish Sun last night, and a visit from Police Scotland this morning, the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Catherine Calderwood, clearly had to say something.

She said she was sorry.

But she admitted that she had visited her second home in Fife not just this weekend with her husband and family, when a photographer was alerted, but also last weekend with her husband.

This pattern of behaviour, clearly a flouting of the guidance, was revealed at the usual media briefing from St Andrew's

House, which became unusual for a couple of reasons.

During the briefing which is done over the video platform, Zoom, each news outlet is allowed to put forward one journalist who is allowed just one question.

There was therefore no evidence that the First Minister or the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), or indeed the Health Secretary were given a terribly rough ride by the press today.

The CMO was in the room the whole time, but was not of course subject to the stares or glances of anyone else in the room. The First Minister was pretty tight-lipped and freely admitted that although she had warned at the outset that the government would undoubtedly make mistakes this was not one she wanted.

It appeared to us that the BBC camera focused pretty squarely on the First Minister for much of the press conference. There were no wide shots of all three as there have been before.

And the Health Secretary, Jeane Freeman, was not asked one question, nor did she make a statement.

The CMO made a statement explaining that she has read the outpouring from the public on social media, particularly Twitter. She knows what she did was wrong. She said: "I am very sorry. It will not happen again. This was a mistake, human error and there are no excuses. My intention is to continue to focus on my job."

She also went on to apologise to the police for the time they had to spend with her this morning, effectively telling her off and reminding her of the message she has fronted.

Several journalists asked if the videos of the CMO giving advice to stay at home would still be used, and a straight answer was not really offered. The Deputy Chief Medical Officer is [Dr Gregor Smith](#), who to our knowledge, has never

been present at any of these public briefings.

The First Minister did not condone the CMO's behaviour, but she stood up for Catherine Calderwood, saying that she needed her advice right now. She said: "Over the past few weeks, as we have been dealing with this crisis, her advice and expertise has been invaluable to me, and continues to be so. I need her to focus on the job she is doing."

That the First Minister is sticking by her CMO at this point is clear. Whether she will continue to do so we will have to wait and see.

The First Minister had some important announcements to make, but all was overshadowed by discussion of the CMO's behaviour.

The first was that the Scottish Government has made £30 million available for local authorities to feed people who are most in need – families with children who are eligible for free school meals, older people, those with long-term health conditions and pregnant women.

There is a degree of flexibility built in to the way that this money, which will be distributed by COSLA, is used. It is part of the £350 million Communities Fund already announced by Communities Secretary Aileen Campbell on 18 March 2020.

The First Minister said that 10,000 people have now volunteered, and that over half of those are health care staff. The number also includes medical students and former NHS and private care employees.

Students will be allowed to work while studying and will do so on a paid for basis. New recruits will be entitled to the same sick pay entitlements as they would if they had five years' service. Checks such as PVG and disclosure are being fast tracked to allow the recruits to take up the jobs as soon as they can.

Health Secretary Jeane Freeman said: “I give my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has come forward to assist the NHS at this critical and unprecedented time.

“Our response to the COVID-19 outbreak is going to require a huge effort across all areas of health and social care. It is still possible for others to also offer their services, and if they willing and able I would encourage them to do so.

“The response we have already received shows the incredible dedication of our healthcare community, both from those just starting out in their careers and also others who have already given many years’ service.

“We owe each and every one of them, and everyone else currently working on the front line, a huge debt of gratitude.

“Those coming forward to work in our NHS are joined by the many thousands of members of the public who have signed up through the new ‘Scotland Cares’ campaign to help our communities in a variety of ways.

“The spirit and enthusiasm being shown by people from all walks of life is truly inspirational, and I thank them all.”

Police Scotland issued a tweet earlier confirming that they visited Dr Calderwood at home in Edinburgh this morning:

Chief Constable [@CC_Livingstone](#) statement on the conduct of the Chief Medical Officer. pic.twitter.com/oTkCyk6xzd

– Police Scotland (@policescotland) [April 5, 2020](#)