

NHS Volunteer Responders information for health professionals

31 March 2020, Version 1

1. Context

NHS Volunteer Responders have been mobilised to help support vulnerable individuals who are self-isolating. Priority will be given to those identified as [most at risk from COVID-19](#) and asked to self-isolate at home for an extended period, and to those who health practitioners and local authorities consider to be vulnerable. The volunteer initiative is being delivered by NHS England and NHS Improvement in partnership with Royal Voluntary Service and enabled by the GoodSam Responders app.

Referrals for volunteer support can be made by the following health and care professionals:

- GPs / social prescribing link workers / practice nurses concerned about an at risk or vulnerable individual they have advised to self-isolate
- Hospital discharge teams
- Community pharmacists
- NHS 111 and ambulance trusts
- Community health trusts that need volunteer support for patients leaving hospital
- Local authorities

NHS Volunteer Responders can be asked to help individuals with tasks such as delivering medicines from pharmacies; driving patients to appointments; bringing them home from hospital; and regular phone calls to check they are ok. Volunteers will receive role specific training where required.

Referrals should be made via the [NHS Volunteer Responders referrers' portal](#)

2. Referral process overview

You can start making referrals into the [NHS Volunteer Responders referrer's portal](#) immediately. Alternatively, from Monday 30 March 2020, you can call 0808 196 3382 to make a referral. We are expecting to start matching volunteers with referred volunteer tasks by Wednesday 1 April 2020.

You will be able to select the type of support needed and the frequency of that support. Once complete, the request will be submitted and the referrer will be sent an email asking to confirm the request. Once confirmed, the referral will go into a matching process and volunteers who are 'on duty' will be able to accept requests.

You can also log into your account at any time to view or cancel your referrals.



NHS Volunteer Responders are not intended to replace local groups helping their vulnerable neighbours but is an additional service provided by the NHS where informal support is not available or easily linked to by health and social care professionals.

Below are some frequently asked questions for you to circulate to your staff.

Frequently Asked Questions (last updated 31 March 2020)

1. What support will these volunteers provide my patients with?

Initially there will be four types of support available to your patients including:

- **Community Response volunteer:** volunteers to collect and deliver shopping, medication or other essential supplies.
- **Patient Transport volunteer:** volunteers to provide transport to patients who are ready for discharge and ensure that they are settled safely back into their homes.

NHS Transport volunteer: volunteers to transport equipment, supplies and/or medication between NHS services and sites. It may also involve assisting pharmacies with medication delivery.

- **Check in and Chat volunteer:** volunteers to provide telephone support to individuals who are at risk of loneliness

2. How does NHS Volunteer Responders connect to other work to protect vulnerable people during the COVID-19 outbreak?

The Government has asked all local resilience forums to put in place arrangements to respond to requests for help from the most clinically vulnerable people. Arrangements are being put in place through these so that those who need to can access support in the form of directly delivered food parcels and other support needs. Individuals will be asked to register via the [government website](#) where they can indicate their need for support.

NHS Volunteer Responders does not replace any local voluntary sector referral mechanisms already established but aims to complement these and provide support for services that cannot access local organisations. Local authorities can also refer people needing assistance into NHS Volunteer Responders where they have wider support needs.

3. How do you make referrals?

Referrals should be made via the [NHS Volunteer Responders referrers' portal](#)

- Add the details of the patient who requires assistance.
- Select both the type of support needed and the frequency it is required. Once this is done, the request is sent automatically to 'on duty' volunteers local to the patient.
- If the healthcare professional chooses to, they can track when the patient receives support via the portal.
- If they want to remove an individual who no longer needs assistance, the practitioner can easily do so, again via the referrers' portal.

From Monday 30 March 2020 you can also call 0808 196 3382 to refer patients.

4. What is GoodSAM?

GoodSAM is an app that operates internationally to dispatch highly trained volunteers to help with emergency situations. It is already used by the ambulance service and NHS 111.

5. Should a single nominated person set up an account on behalf of each organisation?

This is open to each organisation to decide. We have left this flexible to suit different needs. Referrals can be made by any health professional listed above.

6. Will the account holder also be told if no one is available to offer support?

Yes, if the referrer uses the portal correctly.

7. How are patients matched to volunteers?

Once a healthcare professional has made a request for patient support, the request is identified as an active volunteer task to volunteers registered in the local area. The volunteers pick the job they want to do that day and close the task once complete. Volunteers show themselves as 'available' when their app is switched to 'on'.

8. Will all volunteers be DBS checked?

ID checks will be carried out for all volunteers. Patient transport drivers will need an enhanced DBS check and will receive additional guidance. Volunteers will receive guidance, including on social distancing rules to ensure the group being asked to shield themselves is protected.

9. What training will volunteers undergo?

All new volunteers will receive a get-started pack appropriate to the roles they sign up to so they will have specific, clear and detailed guidance which will enable them to provide support safely.

10. Are all volunteers over 18?

Volunteers must be over 18 years old and fit and well with no symptoms. Those in high-risk groups (including those over 70, whose who are pregnant or with underlying medical conditions) will be able to offer support via telephone.

11. Is this UK wide?

Initially this group will support patients living in England, and so volunteers need to live in England.

12. How can people volunteer?

The process for volunteers is:

- Register on the [NHS Volunteer Responders page](#).
- Complete your details and identify which volunteer roles you are interested in.
- Once your registration and checks are complete you will be emailed a verification code and log-in details.
- Download the GoodSAM Responders app and log in.
- Switch on the app when you're available for volunteering jobs.

13. Will patients be able to self-refer?

We are strongly encouraging health professionals or local authorities to refer patients that they have concerns about directly. However, you can also pass the

telephone number for the contact centre directly to patients for them to self-refer if they are in the high-risk group from Monday 30 March 2020 on 0808 196 3382.