

24 March 2020

NHS PPE, Beards and COVID-19

To Whom It May Concern,

It has been brought to the attention of Sikh Assembly over the last 24 hours, that amidst the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic currently gripping our communities and pushing the limit of our beloved NHS to the precipice of sustainable health and welfare service provision, that the frontline staff are being assessed for their own health and safety standards in line with the correct, appropriate and absolutely necessary guidelines for ensuring the protection of patients and combating the potential for the virus from spreading.

It is in this context that we have been approached by many Sikhs who are initiated into the Khalsa and are often referred to as baptised orthodox Sikhs as per the established Sikh doctrine. The issue is one of heightened concerns and new guidance related to frontline NHS staff and their facial hair, which as a Khalsa must be maintained unshorn or unshaved.

As a fundamental belief and intrinsic part of the Sikh faith, belief and instruction of an initiated Sikh, one is unable to shave their facial hair under any circumstances and we would ask those responsible for NHS policy and guidelines to bear in mind the impact such a decision would have on Sikh medical professionals and their ability to perform their tasks at such a time.

In the interests of all who are suffering and those who will require the undivided attention and assistance of the NHS in the coming days, weeks and months we urge the NHS policy and decision making apparatus to consider issuing respiratory hoods alongside Hazmat suits before considering any reassignment away from COVID-19 related duties of Sikh staff that have facial hair.

Sikh Assembly feels that as a nation it is essential to be utilising all aspects of our communities at this time so that the NHS is able to maintain the freedom of religion of its staff who continue to be valuable members of the national effort to save lives and protect people in our collective efforts to curb this deadly virus.

Regards,

Paramjit Kaur Matharu
Sikh Assembly, CEO