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Treatment of Covid Patients

Further to your internal review and response to my FOI request (29326), please can you answer the following:

1. Who gave instruction to Belfast Trust Hospitals NOT to give Ivermectin as an early intervention drug for the treatment of Covid?

Advice regarding the use of Ivermectin was obtained from the Chief Medical Officer on 23 September 2021 and was as follows:

USE OF UNLICENSED MEDICINES IN THE TREATMENT OF COVID-19

This letter is to remind all prescribers and healthcare professionals that only licensed medicines should be prescribed for the treatment or prevention of COVID-19. Reports in some media outlets including social media platforms are continuing to suggest that certain types of medicines such as ivermectin, chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine can protect patients from coronavirus or treat COVID-19. The Department is aware of a number of reports from GPs who have been asked to prescribe unlicensed and unproven treatments for COVID-19 by other healthcare professionals and by members of the public.

You are reminded that these medicines remain unlicensed for the treatment of COVID-19 related symptoms or the prevention of COVID-19 infection and should not be prescribed to patients for this purpose. A number of clinical trials are ongoing around the world to test these medicines as potential agents in the treatment and prevention of COVID-19. Until we have clear, definitive evidence on the safety and efficacy of these treatments, they should only be prescribed or supplied within the context of a clinical trial within a controlled research environment. We are continuing to keep this position under constant review in line with emerging research.

A copy of this letter will be available on the Department's website as well as the latest information relating to COVID-19 – <http://www.health-ni.gov.uk/coronavirus>

A similar freedom of information request was published by the Government [Freedom of Information request on Ivermectin for treatment of COVID-19 \(FOI 21-708\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/freedom-of-information-request-on-ivermectin-for-treatment-of-covid-19)

2. What was the Ct (cycle threshold) value being used by Belfast Trust Hospitals for PCR testing in January 2022 - July 2022?

There were numerous PCR based assays for SARS-CoV2 used by the Regional Virus Laboratory. In Belfast Trust we employ Taqman technology and the number of PCR

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cycles for this technology is generally 40 to 45 cycles as stated in manufacturer's instructions. Reporting samples as positive, negative or indeterminate was established after local validation work and was specific for each assay. Samples >ct 40 were reported as negative, below this ct, samples were reported as positive or indeterminate and if reported as indeterminate, a repeat sample was requested.

3. What protocols were being used by Belfast Trust Hospitals to ensure that 'pneumonia' diagnosis was not being mis-diagnosed and treated as Covid?

Infection with Covid may result in a pneumonia, i.e inflammation of the lungs. The diagnosis is made by a physician who interprets signs, symptoms and investigations to reach a definitive diagnosis, which may be bacterial pneumonia or viral (Covid) pneumonitis. Each diagnosis was individual and no protocols were used

4. Did the PCR test that was being used by Belfast Trust Hospitals distinguish between Covid and Pneumonia?

Pneumonia is a diagnosis based on clinical presentation, imaging as well as laboratory testing. The PCR test for any pathogen will only inform the clinician if the pathogen is present or not.

5. Analysis published in the 'Journal of Clinical Investigation' have found that it was known in early 2020 that the use of Ventilators in early intervention for Covid treatment led to a condition known as Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia (VAP) and the study confirms nearly 90% of Covid patients who were put on Ventilators died, via secondary infection of bacterial pneumonia / respiration failure after being put on a ventilator.

Based on this knowledge and findings from early 2020, early in the pandemic, what were the protocols implemented by the Belfast Trust Hospitals in:

a. The application and timing of Ventilator use

During the pandemic guidance on the application and timing of ventilator support was received nationally from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) reference [COVID-19 rapid guideline: managing COVID-19 \(nice.org.uk\)](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/rapidguidance/COVID-19-rapid-guideline-managing-COVID-19)

b. The testing for VAP during ventilator use

Testing for VAP was directed by a Clinician based on individual assessment – see attached document

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c. The aggressive treatment of VAP during ventilator use

All cases of VAP are diagnosed and managed between the ICU and microbiology teams. All patients are considered on a case by case basis, treatment is bespoke for individual patients. In some cases initial treatment in the absence of microbiology results may follow extant Trust guidance for 'Hospital associated pneumonia' which is available on Microguide. All treatment would be reviewed daily by the ICU team, and the microbiologist if required.

d. The prevention of VAP during ventilator use

Prevention of VAP is covered in the attached protocol from early 2020 for the care of patients with COVID.