

Prime Minister's Questions: 20 May

DISCLAIMER: This document contains a scientific fact check of the statements made at the opening of the Prime Minister's Questions Session of 20 May. This summary was compiled in near real-time (before the Hansard transcript) was publicly available so may contain mistakes or other inaccuracies resulting from misunderstanding. Our usual detail of fact-checking has not been performed due to the short turnaround time. Volunteers from Scientists for Labour have undertaken to ensure that the commentary provided in this report is accurate, but it should be taken 'as-is'. Readers are encouraged to check both the original statement made and the actual text of the source below before using this information.

Links are **orange** for news articles

Links are **green** for papers in academic journals.

Links are in **purple** for governmental statistics or advice

Question 1 - A ring around care homes

Statements

- The Health Secretary has stated that the Government set a “protective ring” around care homes from the start.
- This has been contradicted by the Chief Executive Care England, Professor Martin Green, in evidence to the Health Select Committee.
- Those with symptomatic/no assigned COVID status discharged to care homes.
- Government advice from 2-15 April stated that negative tests are not required for discharge to care home.

[NEGATIVE TESTS ARE NOT REQUIRED FOR PATIENTS TO BE DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITALS TO CARE HOMES, WHAT IS PROTECTIVE ABOUT THAT?](#)

Relevant links:

Hancock claim of ‘protective ring’ round care homes questioned	‘Ring around’ care homes
Admission and Care of Residents during COVID-19 Incident in a Care Home	Government advice stating “Negative tests are not required for discharge into care homes” (p. 4)
Health and Social Care Committee - Publications	Health select committee meetings evidence (minutes not yet available)
Coronavirus: Care home bosses say there is 'stark' difference between government talk and reality	“Professor Martin Green, chief executive of Care England which represents care homes, told MPs on Tuesday that from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic care homes were a second thought despite housing the "most vulnerable people".”
Coronavirus: HC-One care boss which has sites in Somerset says COVID-19 is present in two-thirds of homes	Director of HC-One, Britain's largest care home operator says COVID-19 is present in two-thirds of their care homes. Article published 14 April

Summative commentary:

The Leader of the Opposition is correct in the statements he made in this question. Matt Hancock did indeed claim that a ‘protective ring’ was thrown around care homes from the start of the pandemic. This was indeed disputed at the Health and Social Care Select committee meeting on 19 May by the Chief Executive of Care England who stated that from the start, care homes were a second thought. Guidance released by the Government on admission and care of residents during COVID-19 states “negative tests are not required prior to transfers / admissions into the care home”. Published on 2 April, this advice

remained in place up until 15 April. If care homes were a priority from the start, COVID-19 may well have not been able to infiltrate two thirds of HC-One care homes.

This question was correct in its content.

Answer 1

[NO ONE WAS DISCHARGED INTO A CARE HOME WITHOUT THE EXPRESS AUTHORISATION OF A CLINICIAN, AND THE NUMBER OF PATIENTS DISCHARGED INTO CARE HOMES WAS DOWN ON JANUARY IN MARCH. THERE HAS BEEN A SHARP REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF DEATHS IN CARE HOMES.](#)

Statements:

- No-one was discharged into a care home without a clinician's authorisation
- Last week, PM said number of patient discharges is down 40% from January on March
- Sharp reduction in the number of deaths in care homes: deaths down 31% since last week.

Relevant links:

Coronavirus: More than 11,000 deaths in care homes	In the week to 8 May, there were 1,940 care home deaths linked to coronavirus - down from 2,800 the week before
Dataset Number of deaths in care homes notified to the Care Quality Commission, England	Deaths involving COVID-19 in care homes: Week commencing 17/4 : 2036 W/C 24/4: 2485 W/C 1/5: 2210 W/C 8/5: 1556 W/C 15/5: 1369 (only include deaths reported by this point in time: actual figures may be higher due to delays)
Care homes should have been prioritised, MPs told	For the second week running, the review of death certificates by statisticians showed the number of new deaths in care homes had fallen. Public Health England: "high numbers of asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic cases among staff and residents" and that "infection may be being imported into the homes by staff". Professor Martin Green of Care England: "people were being discharged from hospital when we didn't have the testing regime up and running". A lot of care homes had not had the right set-up for isolating patients coming from hospitals,

	while other countries used separate quarantine facilities for infected patients.
COVID-19: Hospital discharge service requirements	Effective 19 March 2020

Summative Commentary:

There has indeed been a reduction in the number of deaths in care homes as a result of COVID-19 in recent weeks, though the reduction does not appear to be as drastic as 31% - the reduction in care home deaths from 8/5 to 15/5 was around 12% compared to the number of death reports on 8/5 (ONS figures).

We cannot find data to support the number of patient discharges being down 40% between January and March - ONS figures appear to only be available from the beginning of April [*this does of course not mean that such data do not exist*]. According to Professor Green of Care England, people were being discharged into care homes before the testing system was up and running. Even if this may have been authorised by clinicians, it would not be sufficient negation of the associated risks.

The answer is correct in its claim of the reduction of deaths in care homes, however, the authorisation by clinicians statement is misleading, and we could not in the available time find evidence to support the claim about the number of patients being discharged.

Question 2 - Discharges into care homes

Statements

- The Chief Executive of Care England says that people were discharged back to care homes without a clear COVID-19 status or were symptomatic.
- In the same evidence to the Health Select Committee Professor Green stated that routine testing has been announced but has not yet been delivered and that he was not clear on when it will arrive.
- Every care home for the over 65s will have been offered testing by 6 June according to the Government's command paper.

WHAT IS CAUSING THE DELAY IN ROUTINE TESTING FOR CARE HOMES?

Relevant links:

Coronavirus: Tests for all care home residents and staff by June, says Hancock	Government plans, dated 16 May
COVID-19 testing chaos set to continue for social care	Some care home organisations are still only testing symptomatic staff. This entails high risk of continued transmission.
Agency staff were spreading Covid-19 between care homes, PHE found in April	Report seen by Guardian on 30 April: DHSC officials had drafted plans for "comprehensive infection prevention and control measures" in care homes. However, they were not published until last Thursday – a fortnight later.

Summative commentary:

Testing of care home staff and residents continues to fall below desired levels of coordination, with different interpretations of Government guidance by different organisations and localities. Care home leaders and professionals continue to be sceptical about when sufficient testing will be in place.

This question was correct in its content.

Answer 2

THERE HAS BEEN A LARGE PROGRAMME OF TESTING IN CARE HOMES, WHICH THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE TO INCREASE, TO A TOTAL OF 200,00 TESTS/DAY NATIONALLY BY 31 MAY.

Statements:

- 125,000 care home staff have been tested, 118,000 care home workers have been tested.
- The Government will continue to increase testing in care homes in the coming weeks.
- The intention is to reach a total of 200,000 tests/day by the end of May.
- The UK is testing more than virtually every country in Europe.

Relevant links:

Coronavirus tests per population/country Coronavirus tests ranked	European countries with the highest number of tests carried out as of 13 May are Germany and Italy. UK ranking 3rd.
State of Report - 2019	An estimated 1.49 million people work in adult social care
Government under fire over care home testing programme	Vic Rayner, Executive Director of the National Care Forum has stated that care homes need 200,000 regular and routine tests per day

Summative Commentary:

The Prime Minister seemed to refute that there was a delay in sufficient testing reaching care homes, by stating that there had been significant increases in testing capacity, particularly for care home staff, and that the UK was testing more than “virtually” any other country in Europe. Both Germany and Italy have currently performed a greater number of tests than the UK (both in absolute and population-relative terms). The statement about the number of care home staff and workers being tested is unclear, due to the lack of distinction between “staff” and “workers”. Given the fact that there are over a million people working in adult social care it is unclear what an acceptable level of testing would be.

The Prime Minister has not given a clear answer regarding what an appropriate level of routine testing will be in care homes, nor when it will begin.

Question 3 - Routine testing (in England)

Statements: follow up

- Clarifies that the previous question related to when routine testing would begin.
- Professor Martin Green stated yesterday in evidence to the Health Select Committee that routine testing in care homes has not yet begun.
- Putting to the PM the evidence of experts rather than the views of LOTO.

Statements: next question

- What is required is testing tracing and isolation.
- The Deputy Chief Scientific advisor stated that we can draw lessons from Germany and South Korea; the number of deaths in Germany is approximately 8000 whilst deaths in South Korea are approximately 300.
- There has been no effective tracing since March 12 when tracing was abandoned.

DOES NEARLY 10 WEEKS WITHOUT EFFECTIVE TRACING CONSTITUTE A SIGNIFICANT GAP IN OUR DEFENCES?

Relevant links:

UK to start coronavirus contact tracing again World news	12th March: PM announces end of contact tracing and community testing after stating the UK epidemic could not be contained that way.
UK plans for contact-tracing in doubt as app not ready until June	Matt Hancock said that a mobile tracking app will be rolling out in mid-May, and this was subsequently pushed back to the end of May.
Phone app delay raises concerns about easing lockdown on 1 June	As of 18 May, Dominic Raab was unable to confirm the app would be ready by 1st June. "In terms of the app, it's still our intention to roll it out across the country for everyone in the weeks ahead. I can't be any more precise at this stage".
South Korea Coronavirus: 11,110 Cases and 263 Deaths	South Korea has reported fewer than 300 deaths.

Germany Coronavirus: 177,842 Cases and 8,193 Deaths	Germany has recorded approximately 8000 deaths from COVID-19.
Trends In Cumulative Incidence and Case Fatality Of COVID-19 in The United States: Extreme Epidemiologic Response	States that the relatively low number of deaths in Germany and South Korea were due to an “extreme epidemiological” response, including extensive contact tracing.

Summative commentary:

The Leader of the Opposition is correct in his statements that there has been no effective tracing since 12 March. He is correct in saying that testing, tracing and isolation is required; with countries such as South Korea and Germany implementing such schemes having markedly lower death rates compared to the UK. Matt Hancock said a mobile tracking app will be rolling out to enable tracing, however it is unclear when this will be implemented and whether it will be before Schools reopen in June.

This question was correct in its content

Answer 3

[THE GOVERNMENT HAS A TESTING AND TRACING OPERATION WHICH WILL BE FULLY IN PLACE BY THE BEGINNING OF JUNE, PROVIDED THE VARIOUS CONDITIONS ARE SATISFIED.](#)

Statements:

- The PM is confident we will have test and trace operation in place by 1 June that will enable progress out of lockdown.
- Currently, the Government has recruited 24,000 ‘trackers’ to run this operation..
- By the 1 June, the operation will employ 25,000 trackers, capable of coping with 10,000 new cases per day. At present, there are around 2,500 new cases per day.

Relevant links:

UK contact tracer jobs shrouded in confusion	This is the first time that the government has said they have recruited 24,000 trackers; on 17 May Michael Gove said the figure was above 17,000.
--	---

'No one had any idea': Contact tracers lack knowledge about Covid-19 job	Government contact tracers claim to be untrained and unable to properly perform their jobs.
UK plans for contact-tracing in doubt as app not ready until June	Uncertainties about planned contact-tracing app.
Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK	There were 2,412 additional cases of laboratory confirmed COVID-19 on Tuesday 19 May

Summative Commentary:

Whilst the PM says he is confident that the operation will be running by 1 June, there has been confusion around UK contact tracer recruitment, including how many people have been recruited and about the quality of training received. It is unclear whether 10,000 new cases per day is a theoretical capability of the system assuming it operates at peak efficiency and delivers adequate training. The PM was correct in stating that there are currently around 2,500 new confirmed cases per day.

The PM's statement is not factually incorrect as his "confidence" that the system will be running by 1 June cannot be fact checked. Significant doubts have been raised about this plan by experts in the field.

Question 4 - Rollout of Test, Track, and Trace

Statements

- 34,000 deaths is a significant negative.
- For 10 weeks there has been no tracing.
- The PM emphasised the importance of test and trace.

CAN THE PM INDICATE AN EFFECTIVE TEST TRACE AND ISOLATE SYSTEM WILL BE IN PLACE ON 1 JUNE?

Relevant links:

Contact tracing: how will the UK's test, track and trace plan help ease lockdown	Released today. The Prime Minister claims we will implement a "world beating test and trace system" by the end of this month.
Germany's COVID-19 contacts tracing app to link to labs for test result notification	Discussion of the tracing app used in Germany.

Summative commentary:

This question reiterates the points made in Question 3. It is true that whilst the PM has repeatedly highlighted the importance of test and trace, this has not yet been delivered, despite progress being made by other countries.

This question was correct in its statements.

Answer 4

THE LOTO DID NOT LISTEN TO THE PREVIOUS ANSWER [THE ANSWER WAS RESTATED IN FULL].

Statements:

- The UK's upcoming test track and trace operation will be world beating, and the Government will have it in place by 1 June.
- The operation will employ 25,000 trackers, capable of coping with 10,000 new cases per day. At present, there are around 2,500 new cases per day.

Summative Commentary:

This answer was a restatement of answer 3. Please refer to the above for further detail.

Question 5 - Immigrant NHS workers' surcharge (I)

Statements

- Many carers are risking their lives during the pandemic.
- Carers from abroad have to pay a surcharge of hundreds, even thousands for using the NHS.

IS IT RIGHT THAT CARE WORKERS COMING FROM ABROAD SHOULD HAVE TO PAY A SURCHARGE TO USE THE NHS?

Relevant links:

UK government urged to scrap £624 NHS charge for migrant care workers	The current surcharge is £400 per year and it is set to rise to £624 in October 2020. Doctors, nurses and paramedics have been granted a one-year exemption from the charge, but there are no plans to extend the same benefit to care workers.
Migrants face £624 annual fee to use NHS after 'shameful' Budget move	The surcharge fee has tripled within the last 14 months. Children will also be charged £470 which means that a family of four would face a charge as high as £2,200 a year. After the Brexit transition period, newcomers from Europe will also have to pay. Almost a quarter of UK NHS staff were born abroad according to the Office of National Statistics. Qualified doctors, nurses and carers may be discouraged from coming to the UK in the future.
Scrap 'unjust' immigration health surcharge for nursing staff, College urges parties	Surcharge deters nurses from coming to the UK, the Chief Executive and General Secretary of the Royal College of Nursing says. Healthcare services in the UK have been stretched to a breaking point and the NHS would not function without nursing staff from overseas.

Summative commentary:

The NHS workers coming from abroad are facing another increase in their surcharges. The fees have tripled within the last 14 months and will stop many future carers from coming into the country. The migrant staff are crucial if the NHS is to function properly. The Government has offered one-year visa extensions and exemptions from the charges during this pandemic, but many migrant workers are not eligible for those benefits.

This question was accurate in its content.

Answer 5

[ACCEPT THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY OUR INTERNATIONAL NHS STAFF, BUT WE MUST LOOK AT THE REALITIES. THESE CONTRIBUTIONS RAISE A LOT OF MONEY, AND WE CANNOT FIND AN ALTERNATIVE SOURCE OF INCOME.](#)

Statements:

- The NHS is a national institution that requires additional funding.
- Carers from abroad are very important for the NHS, and immigration contributions are worth £900m.
- It is difficult to find alternative sources of income for the NHS

Relevant links:

The NHS budget and how it has changed	NHS budget has been over £100bn for more than a decade.
Calls to scrap NHS surcharge for migrant healthcare workers	NHS staff can apply for 1 year visa extension and 1 year exemption from the surcharge. However, many frontline workers are not eligible to apply and, in addition, individuals whose visa comes up for renewal next year will not benefit from this.
EEA migration in the UK: Final report	2018 report on EEA migration in the UK. They found 'no doubt that EEA migrants contribute more to the health workforce than they consume in health care'.
Overview of importance of migration for NHS services	There is a very real risk that the migration policies proposed will make it more difficult to bring staff into the NHS and social care from the European Economic Area. The NHS relies very heavily on migrant workers.

Summative Commentary:

The Prime Minister stated that the financial contribution of NHS migrant workers is necessary for the NHS budget and no alternative can be found. Despite a contribution of £900 million from charges over a 3-4 year period from migrant workers, it is thought that an additional increase will result in a decline in

incoming migrant workers. About a quarter of NHS staff were born abroad and experts say that without the contribution of those migrant workers the NHS would cease to function

The Prime Minister stated that he believed this was an appropriate source of funding for the NHS. However, his answer appears to neglect that this surcharge could undermine other efforts of the Government to bolster the NHS.

Question 6 - Immigrant NHS workers' surcharge (II)

Statements

- The fee in question is £400 per year rising to £624 in October.
- Carers would have to work 70 hours per year on the National Living Wage.
- The Doctors' Association have condemned the surcharge.
- Labour will table an amendment to deal with this.

WILL THE PRIME MINISTER RECONSIDER MAINTAINING THE NHS SURCHARGE FOR INTERNATIONAL NHS EMPLOYEES?

Relevant links:

Pay for UK healthcare as part of your immigration application	Government guidance on healthcare costs for foreign nationals. The fee in question is currently £400 a year
DAUK writes to Home Secretary	Doctors Association letter to the Home Secretary - 18 May 2020
Immigration health surcharge to rise following budget announcement	The fee in question will rise to £624

Summative commentary:

The cited fees in this question are correct, as was the reference to a letter from the Doctors Association.

This question was correct in its statements.

Answer 6

IT IS IMPORTANT TO SUPPORT OUR NHS AND INVEST IN IT. THE GOVERNMENT WILL INVEST IN THE NHS AND PAY FRONTLINE WORKERS PROPERLY. WE ARE BUILDING NEW HOSPITALS AND RECRUITING MORE NURSES.

Statements:

- We must support the NHS with massive investment.
- The government is determined to invest more than any other in modern memory and pay NHS staff properly, and build 40 new hospitals whilst recruiting 50,000 more nurses.

Relevant links:

New hospital building programme announced - GOV.UK	So far, six hospitals have been given the go-ahead to start building for delivery in 2025-30. Furthermore, health trusts have been given £100m to develop business cases for new hospitals.
Exclusive: Leak reveals government fears over 50,000 nurses plan	This article casts doubts on the ability of the Government to deliver this promise
Boris Johnson admits only 31,000 of Tories' 50,000 'more' nurses are actually new	Of 50,000 promised new nurses, only 31,000 will actually be new (meaning they were not already nurses).

Summative Commentary:

The Prime Minister avoided this question with a restatement of election pledges made during the 2019 GE. As these statements remain pledges, it is not possible to fact check them at this time, though reasonable doubts have been cast by individuals across the political spectrum as to whether these pledges are possible. It has been noted on several occasions that many of the promised 'new' nurses are already practicing nurses.

The question was not addressed in this answer.