Dear Colleague,

I hope you are safe and well during these unprecedented times.

We have established an LLR COVID-19 EDI Taskforce to use as a forum for discussing and informing how we respond to EDI COVID-19 issues. Things are changing daily, and the purpose of the EDI Taskforce will be to feed issues and recommendations up to the LLR Workforce COVID-19 Systems Cell, which is jointly chaired by Hazel Wyton and Sarah Willis, the Directors of Workforce and Organisational Development for UHL and LPT respectfully.

The vision for the LLR EDI Taskforce is to facilitate collaboration across the system in response to Covid-19 issues.

Key Objectives:

- To provide an opportunity to share EDI information relating to the response to Covid-19.
- To provide recommendations and escalate issues to the LLR Workforce COVID-19 Systems |Cell.
- To establish a two way communication process between EDI practitioners within the LLR System and NHS England and NHS Improvement EDI teams at the regional and national level.

The group members and their respective organisations are listed in the below:

Bina Kotecha	**Deputy Director of Learning and Organisational Development, UHL / Taskforce Co-Chair**
Leanne Blanden	**LLR System Communications and engagement**
Jemini Thakarshi	**LLR System Co-ordinator**
Aloma Onyemah	**Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion, UHL / Taskforce Co-Chair**
Shaheen Mulla	**Equality Co-ordinator, UHL**
Haseeb Ahmad	**Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, LPT**

Abby Reynolds	**Support Worker to Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, LPT**
Paul Fitzgerald	**EDI Lead, EMAS**
Andrew Jeffreys	**Equalities Policy Officer, Leicestershire County Council**
Hannah Watkins	**Equalities Manager, Leicester City Council**
Sandy Zavery	**Workforce, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Lead, LOROS**
Shaun Cropper	**Equalities Business Partner LLR CCG's**
Surinder Singh	**Equality Officer, Leicester City Council**
Gurpreet Grewal-Santini	**Cultural Link Worker, Rainbows**

This is the first in a series of timely LLR System EDI communications to let you know what can be accessed at a local, regional and national level in terms of supporting the values of EDI.

We understand that staff aren't always able to read emails, and ask that if you are a line manager please support your team by printing the information off when you receive it, and read the information out during daily team huddles or by placing it on team notice boards. Those who aren't line managers but do have access to emails, please print the information out and share it with your colleagues.

We will be providing regular updates on live EDI issues and will also include deep dives into specific equality areas, the first of which will be focussed on Religion and Belief.

LLR System Equality, Diversity and Inclusion focus on Religion and Belief

Religious Observance During Covid-19

Within the LLR system we believe that striving to accommodate religious beliefs and practices is best achieved by being responsive to employees' requests during these unprecedented times.

Access to Chapels and Prayer Rooms
We consider it important to keep the workplace prayer facilities open during Covid-19 as this will have a positive impact on staff wellbeing during an already difficult period. Therefore, at present, workplace chapels will remain open for use by individual members of staff and the public during covid-19. We also recognise that during these challenging times it is important to ensure that staff have access to our chaplaincy

services and will promote the Chaplaincy "Listening Ear" for staff alongside other staff support resources provided.

With respect to prayer rooms, notices are in place to remind users to abide by infection prevention guidelines, including hand washing and social distancing whilst using the facilities. All users of prayer rooms must bring their own prayer mats (and for women, headscarves) rather than sharing those in prayer rooms. During Covid-19 the communal mats and scarves have been removed, and extra cleaning has been requested.

Wearing of PPE and Religious Observance
NHS organisations are facing an emerging issue with PPE, specifically face masks. In order to be effective, FFP3 type face masks have to form a seal to the face. Face masks can often not be used correctly which is why fitting/fit testing is required to ensure they are being used effectively.

Beards, stubble and facial hair cause a common problem when using PPE face masks, as this can prevent the mask being able to seal to the face and passing the fit test. As the outbreak continues, there is a significant increase in the numbers of staff who need to wear the mask, and those who need to be trained and ready to wear them.

Any concerns employees have should be discussed with their manager, getting further support from Occupational Health if required. Where required, alternative solutions should be explored to ensure staff are being supported as much as is reasonably possible. There are alternatives to masks that can be provided where required, which are hoods or helmets (subject to availability).

Ramadan
The month of Ramadan will begin on Thursday 23 April and end on of Saturday 23 May this year.

Ramadan involves a daily period of fasting for Muslims starting at sunrise and finishing at sunset over the month. This means abstaining from food, drink (including water) and smoking. While fasting is an important part of Ramadan, it is also a time of self-reflection and self-evaluation for Muslims.

This year will be very different for staff that are Muslim and fasting during Ramadan, as traditionally communal activities and prayer are observed and encouraged. Where possible we would like to offer flexibility around existing holiday entitlement, working patterns or break periods. In consideration of staffing needs during Covid-19 we would advise that line managers' discretion will need to be used and this may prove more challenging if resources are reduced due to staff absence from self-isolation and illness. One option that may help staff is to work night shifts so that they can rehydrate through the shift. National guidance is being prepared for healthcare staff by Muslim leaders.

Staff should also be aware of the health issues related to fasting so that they are able to make informed choices, minimise complications and maximise the benefit of their fast as well as operational effectiveness. Those who are ill with COVID-19 may not

be able to take part in daily fasting, as fasting is not compulsory or advisable for anyone who is ill or has a serious medical condition.

Mosques in Britain may also have to prepare for the very likely possibility of suspending Ramadan *Iftar* (daily breaking of the fast) programs, congregational prayers and *Eid* (end of Ramadan Celebration) prayers, and supporting their communities with alternative services remotely.

Religious Observance and Overseas Travel
We expect that the pandemic will stretch well into Ramadan during April/May 2020. As countries respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, many airlines are suspending flights and many airports are closing, preventing flights from leaving.

Entry to Saudi Arabia for the purpose of pilgrimage such as Umrah and/or visiting the Prophet's Mosque in Medina has also been temporarily suspended. There is also a temporary suspension on entry and prayer in the outer courtyards of the Two Holy Mosques in Makkah and Medina.

We would advise that staff follow the UK government guidelines relating to COVID-19 and unnecessary travel. Please see the link below:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus

For further Information and resources please click on the UHL links below

(Please add links below to your own organisations as these are UHL links).

- INsite Equality and Diversity web pages on Ramadan
- INsite Chaplaincy Service web pages

We are keen to hear from you in relation to ideas that will help in your organisations to support the equality, diversity and inclusion as described above.

Please get in touch by emailing the LLR System EDI Team via the following mailbox address:

LLRAcademy@uhl-tr.nhs.uk