Dear veterinary colleagues,

As you are no doubt aware, the COVID-19 pandemic is placing unprecedented pressure on the UK health service, in particular Intensive Care Units.

It is envisaged that the number of intensive care beds may need to increase by as much as a factor of ten over the coming weeks. Whilst physical kit is relatively straight forward to source, suitably skilled personnel are the resource which critically lack.

It is possible that at the height of the surge, we may not be able to staff the increased numbers of ICU beds using ‘traditional’ staff sources. We believe that as veterinary nurses, there may well be a role for those who would be willing to help.

We envisage that we would train vets up as ‘respiratory assistants’, providing a package of training to allow you to care for a ventilated patient within pre-set parameters and physiological aims to act as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the ICU medics. It is possible that this will be happening in a newly built ‘Nightingale’ Hospital in Exeter. To reassure you, this would NOT include any decisions about triage, airway interventions such as intubation or decisions about withdrawal of active treatment.

We aim to deliver a theory based training package next Thursday 9th April virtually via zoom.

I would like to reassure you that full PPE will be provided. We would never let any of our staff care for COVID positive patients without full and appropriate PPE and this remains a line in the sand for us.

We are currently lobbying politically to insure your liability for this work. However, with a predicted 2 week time period before the predicted surge, we wanted to start training so that we are not left behind by red tape in the full expectation that this will be sanctioned centrally.