

## PRESS RELEASE



May 18, 2020

### **UK accepts smell/taste changes as symptoms of COVID-19; Hampshire patient advocacy charity takes lead role**

#### **What if you wake up and can't smell the coffee? It may indicate you have Covid-19**

On Monday, 18 May, the UK finally joined the US, Europe and the WHO by including loss of smell or taste as an officially recognised symptom of COVID-19. Those calling NHS 111 with sudden loss of smell will now be told they are likely to have COVID-19, are eligible for a test, and should self-isolate.

For eight weeks, the UK branch of the [Global Consortium for Chemosensory Research](#) (GCCR) and [ENT-UK](#) have been calling for loss of smell (anosmia) to be recognised as a marker for asymptomatic carriers of the virus [[View here](#)]. Today, Professor Claire Hopkins, President of the BRS, issued a [statement](#) on behalf of the BRS and ENTUK:

*“We are delighted that...patients with new onset anosmia should be advised to self-isolate in order to reduce the risk of transmission, and we are hopeful that all members of the public developing anosmia will be able to access testing. We estimate that many hundreds of thousands of patients in the UK have developed anosmia as a result of COVID-19”*

In order to discover more, researchers from the University of London together with colleagues from the GCCR have produced a survey about change of smell and taste during the COVID-19 pandemic. Professor Barry Smith from the University of London, the UK lead for the GCCR, said:

*“If enough people are able to tell us about their sudden loss of smell or taste, this will provide vital clues that could be part of the story about the prevalence of the virus in the population – information the Government can all upon before mass antibody testing is available.”*

The survey can be found [here](#).

The UK researchers in GCCR, who are made up of clinicians, sensory scientists and patient advocates: “have contributed at every turn” according to Professor Smith, “by publishing scientific findings, writing letters to leading medical journals, and by informing the public directly through [social media](#), [newspaper articles](#) and podcasts.”

Founder of the smell loss charity AbScent, Chrissi Kelly, has been working with Professor Hopkins, Professor Smith and others on a daily basis to push for recognition of smell dysfunction as a symptom of COVID-19. Her work on the Leadership Team of the GCCR has meant that patient advocacy groups have been represented on the highest level in this endeavour.

*“From February of this year, AbScent was receiving reports of a wave of cases from Iran, followed by Italy and Spain”, said Kelly. “I immediately reported this to my clinician contacts. AbScent membership more than doubled, and our new Facebook group for COVID-19 patients was overwhelmed with people from all over the world. AbScent has had an important role in signposting details about development of smell and taste changes to the GCCR and our clinicians here in the UK. This is vital information that will help build a better picture of what is happening for these patients.”*

AbScent provides a full range of support, education and practical advice for patients with smell loss, including the [AbScent Smell Training Protocol](#), the [Snif Smell Training app](#), and a [website](#). We work together with another UK patient advocacy group Fifth Sense to assist the GCCR in their work.

The UK GCCR team hope that this new recognition of the importance of smell, and the effect of its loss on people’s lives, will encourage further work into olfaction, uniting the interests of ENT practitioners, sensory scientists and the many patients who have already contributed so much to understanding the link between COVID-19 and loss of smell.

**ENDS**

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#### Notes to editors:

- [AbScent](#) is a UK registered charity No. 1183468 started in 2018 to help people who are experiencing the distressing effects of smell loss.
- Logos and photos can be downloaded at <https://abscent.org/resources/press-information>
- For more information on the latest available research into smell loss visit: <https://abscent.org/learn-us/latest-research-research>
- AbScent's vision is a world where smell loss is recognised by the general population as a challenging condition, where patients are fully supported by the medical community and their care circles, and where healing strategies are explored, funded and made available to the world-wide population.
- The effects of smell loss can be complex and therefore support is necessary from several areas to suit the biopsychosocial needs of the community.
- [Smell Training](#) is a supportive technique for people who have suffered smell loss and has been demonstrated in over a dozen scientific studies to be of benefit for people who have lost their sense of smell after a virus or injury.
- [Smell training](#) is not a cure, but a way of amplifying natural recovery. Every time it is done it stimulates the olfactory nerves and this encourages the nerve to regenerate. It can be likened to physiotherapy for the nose.
- AbScent consists of Founder Chrissi Kelly, Trustees Miriam Block and ENT Simon Gane of the Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital in London, and an advisory board detailed on the website.

[www.abscent.org](http://www.abscent.org)