



## **From the Deputy National Welfare Advisor**

Dear Area/Branch Secretaries, Welfare Officers and Shipmates

### **CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) – ARE YOU AN APPY SHIPMATE?**

Ahoy shipmates

Before you reach for the keyboard to remind me to spell check articles, I can spell and the title is deliberate. I do sincerely hope all shipmates are happy in these difficult times but are you "Appy" and getting the best out of Apps on your devices? Apps are a fact of life these days and we all use them. This short briefing explains what apps are and what useful one there are in welfare terms.

**What is an app?** An app (application) is a type of software that allows you to perform specific tasks and there are applications for desktop or laptop computers called desktop applications, whilst those for mobile devices (smart phones) are called mobile apps. When you open an application, it runs inside the operating system on the device until you close it. There are a huge number of apps covering all aspects of life with a combined total of 3.83 million in 2019 in the Google Play and Apple App Store.

**How do they work?** Apps are shortcuts to access sites and particularly useful on our smart phones. Many shipmates may not have online access but smart phones are widely used and come with pre-loaded apps and you can easily add more (useful) ones yourself. Apps allow us to access sites for help and information immediately wherever we are. Most shipmates will be using them without thinking and they work on tablets too! So tech lesson over how do they help?

**What use are they to me in welfare terms?** When you need help or advice you want it quickly and, whilst your Welfare officer or shipmates in Branch or RNA Helpline can help, not everyone is in a branch and/or particularly at this time of social distancing and shielding can meet to help you. It can be daunting too looking online for the best organisation to meet your needs whether health, welfare or other. Apps provide quick 24/7 access to such information in the palm of your hand and a useful means of taking the pressure off NHS 111 for non-urgent NHS information for example.

**What Apps can help me find welfare help and advice? Veterans Gateway recently launched a new app** to support the Armed Forces community, veterans and their families (see <https://www.cobseo.org.uk/veterans-gateway-launches-new-app-to-support-armed-forces-community/>). This app on a smartphone or tablet helps you to find or finds on a shipmate's behalf organisations within your local area to help with issues such as finances, housing, employment, relationships, physical and mental health. It is a directory based, user-friendly grouping of all NHS facilities across the country and over 2,000 charitable organisations. It can also be used to contact Veterans Gateway in addition to their usual contact routes. This allows veterans and their families to find and access the local support they need in their area. It acts as a 24/7 signpost to services including NHS in your area that can help with your need. The Veterans' Gateway app is available for free on the Apple App Store for iPad and iPhone at <https://www.apple.com/uk/ios/app-store/> and Google Play at <https://play.google.com/store> for Android users.

**Forces Connect** was launched earlier this year before Veterans Gateway however Forces Connect is currently limited in coverage to South East England (who were first to launch as FCSE), Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and South West England. Others areas are in discussion. **What's the difference?** The mission is the same to signpost members of the armed forces community and their families to services and organisations local to them that can offer the support they need. This



app is easy to download and very easy to navigate and you can get to where you need in just four clicks. It provides in-depth information and links so a really good tool with everything a veteran would need in the palm of their hand. Its drawback is limited coverage (currently) but it is still useful to those in the areas covered. Forces Connect is available for free on the Apple App Store (<https://www.apple.com/uk/ios/app-store/>) and Google Play (<https://play.google.com/store>)

**What is this NHS COVID-19 app in the news?** This has been developed as a contact tracing app to help track and slow the spread of coronavirus whilst protecting your privacy. This is part of the next phase of the government's approach to beating Coronavirus. After installation on your mobile phone, it will send you an alert if you've been in close contact with other users of the app who have reported that they're experiencing coronavirus symptoms. You can do what's necessary to avoid passing the virus on e.g. self-isolating.

**What do I need to know?** Installation of the app is totally voluntary but you will be helping to slow the transmission of the coronavirus. It's up to you to decide if you want to tell the app that you're suffering from coronavirus symptoms. The app does **not** collect any of your personal data, any information you choose to submit is protected at all times and any submitted information is deleted once it is no longer needed to help manage the spread of coronavirus. It's your choice shipmates in all respects.

**How does it work and help me?** The app can detect by Bluetooth if other phones running the app are nearby and calculate **how close** it has been to other phones running the app, and for **how long**. The app can then build up an idea of which of these phones owners are most at risk based on reports of Coronavirus symptoms. If the app has been used to report experience of coronavirus symptoms, all the phones that have been nearby will receive an alert from the app so the user will know they may have been near a person with coronavirus and can then self-isolate. If a diagnosis turns out to be wrong, contacted users will receive a second alert to stop self-isolation.

**When will it be available?** The NHS COVID-19 App currently is on trial on the Isle of Wight but there have been a number of teething problems such as just downloading the app, multiple false alerts to users, compatibility with the Apple iPhone and concerns on effects on battery life. There is a bigger issue though on whether the first NHS approach of storing anonymised data about people infected with Covid-19 and their contacts in a central database is the best way to do this.

The other option is to use a standardised system such as Google and Apple's standardised system which is largely decentralised and prevents gathering of additional data, such as location but there are concerns with those systems too. Launch of those was scheduled for mid-May as a software update.

You won't be surprised to know shipmates that NHS is developing both options now in parallel! Which UK app will be used for roll-out is not known yet but we are not the only country struggling; Germany has already switched from its own first app to using the smart phone makers' system whereas France has decided to do its own thing (no change there then and so much for EU consensus). It will be a political as well as a technical and ethical decision. For more information see <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/information/nhs-covid-19-app-explainer>

**A Virtual Contact App for you** - You may already use Facetime, Skype or WhatsApp but do have a look at the free app ZOOM as it allows several people to speak and see each other at the same time. Ideal for family or shipmate gatherings of varying size. Joining and using were excellently summarised by shipmate Julie Royston in the May Semaphore Circular at <https://royal-naval-association.co.uk/members/downloads/2020/>. Zoom is easy to use, just take your time and see more at <https://zoom.us/> where you can sign up for a free account. There is a time limit on 40min per session on free accounts after which charges apply but you can always stop and start again. Some small points of etiquette to remember:

- Never say anything you don't want to be heard as your microphone is always ON – unless you mute it

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- Be aware of background noises in your room/home - it makes it difficult for others to hear
  - Make sure your attire is suitable (so all you closet naturists need to dress appropriately)
  - Do not swear (difficult for some shipmates maybe but there may be ladies present)
- Help on problems or want to learn more about how to run a Zoom meeting? Go to the Facebook Pages of the Royal Naval Association Central Office Royal Naval Association: Community Site or call the RNA helpline 07542 680082

**Please distribute this widely, keep following government public health guidelines and look after your shipmates and oppos by phone. text, e-media or letter.**

Stay Safe, Stay Well and Stay at Home,

*Geoff Apperley*