

The COVID-19 pandemic: a letter from an old nurse



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How many of us have jumped instantly out of our comfort zone? Don't we usually sit and contemplate our next moves; decide if we can do this. Does it fit around my lifestyle? Can I afford to change? After 45 years of nursing, this is exactly what I did! My only worry at the time was am I doing enough to help society? Yes, I am a nurse. I was considered vulnerable as I'm a little plump and I have asthma, but still I had to take this giant leap! Just before lockdown I flew in from Saudi Arabia where people were just beginning to talk about the COVID-19 virus. It was strange flying not knowing who may have the virus and what we should do. The next day we were put into lockdown, this was the start of my journey.

My poor mum, who was 86, worried everyday while I was out working six days a week, more hours than I have worked in years. Not to mention it was totally out of my comfort zone. I always worked in hospitals and became a nurse specialist in wound care. After which I changed my path slightly to support industry as a specialist, travelling the world for an American company. In four years, I visited countries I could never have dreamed of seeing and meeting the most amazing people. I learnt there are many of us who are grateful just to have a wound washed once a week, not demanding the latest technology.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic happened, there was a lockdown in the UK, in fact in most of the world. Where we could and we went virtual we used skype, Zoom, teams, any contacts we could overseeing many countries. But, for me, this wasn't enough. Within weeks I felt frustrated, I wanted to do more, so I contacted the local GP who sent my details through the system. I was contacted from a GP manager, a few miles away. They had nurses off long-term and asked if I could help out. Into the community I went, they set me up on a system, one that, without the help of the admin girls, I was at first "stuffed" (for want of a better word). Admin helped me when I lost my way around as the system it was so different from the hospital systems I had used.

Personal protective equipment (PPE), that was a whole story in itself. We sweated, we couldn't breathe, we had sore faces, but still we carried on. The pride

I felt for all my colleagues was unbelievable. How could we face this adversity? We had sad moments, especially when colleagues succumbed to the virus. I will always remember them for the service they gave.

Personally, I started off doing wounds for the practise and then hooray! The vaccines came, one of the most amazing events of my whole career. Not only did we have Pfizer from abroad but Astra Zeneca from the UK. If you wonder did I want to get the vaccine. The answer is, you bet I did. I wanted to get that needle in every arm I could find.

Online training, became my next job, we did everything they wanted, how to vaccinate, what to watch for. You name it there was a study section on it. Once trained many of us worked around our other roles. I not only worked in our local hub, but started home visits for the sheltered patients. We followed government guidelines, working down the groups.

There were some funny moments along the way, one older lady asked why I had not asked her if she was pregnant, as I had the last patient. I said "are you pregnant?" her reply was "no but I wouldn't mind trying if you know any fit young men", we were in stitches. These little incidents made all our lives better in a very frail world.

Today, the urgency is lifting and large numbers are now vaccinated, our death rates are lower, as the vaccine seems to be protecting many from hospital admission, relieving our exhausted care system.

Why am I writing this letter you may wonder. I want to express my sincere gratitude to my local colleagues, friends, all the health professionals, not forgetting the managers and reception girls who have worked tirelessly with frustration from clients. Both here and in other countries you rose to the challenge you kept fighting we probably will never win this battle, due to new strains coming along each year, but we can, as a team, hold it at bay. This isn't about singing my story it's about support gratitude, and thanks.

In July I saw my mother for only the third time in 18 months. She had the vaccine which allowed me to visit. When she cuddled me, it brought tears to my eyes, so long had I waited for what was once an everyday action. God bless and stay safe!

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