

COVID-19 STRAIGHT FROM THE FRONTLINE

A Question & Answer report from an NHS worker (aka my mum) by Liam

On the 23rd of March 2020 life as we knew it was about to change and if we're honest, none of us knew just how much. We had watched on in denial as countries such as China and Italy battled the deadly Covid-19 virus. With their health services overwhelmed, death tolls on the rise and no sign of a reprieve, governments had no choice other than to declare national lockdowns. Like wildfire, the virus spread across the world with devastating consequences.

Finally, it was Britain's turn. People were told to only go out if it was absolutely necessary. One hour of exercise each day, along with essential trips to pick up food and medicine was all that was permitted. Unless you fell under the key worker category, you were told to work from home. Schools closed, leaving parents to adjust to the pressures of home schooling and our highstreets with their clothes shops, restaurants, hairdressers and bars pulled down their shutters. For how long nobody knew.

9 weeks on, the countries economic outlook is bleak but there's a glimmer of hope that life may be returning to some form of normality. However, it's evident that the new normal is one that will take a lot of getting used to.

Here is a frontline workers perspective on how the last 9 weeks have unfolded in their eyes.

Liam - "Hi, could you please introduce yourself."

Mum - "My name is Laura, I work as a specialist radiographer at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital."

Liam - "Has your job been more stressful since lockdown?"

Mum - "Yes, definitely! There's security at all the entrances to the hospital. People have been more on-edge and infection control protocols have been changing daily so just when you think you've got your head around things, it changes again. The whole layout of the hospital has changed, with red zones and corridors for infected patients and green zones for clear patients. It's been stressful having to wear PPE all the time. The masks are the worst, they make you feel really claustrophobic and it's so hot. It's been difficult not being able to eat, drink and go to the toilet when you like. Usually I would be able to go in and out of theatre during operations but once a patient is ventilated and you're in theatre with your full PPE, then that's you. I was stuck in there for nearly 4 hours last weekend, it makes you feel mentally drained. Luckily, I work with an amazing group of people so we're all trying to keep one another's spirits up."

Liam - "Has there been a shortage of PPE in Grampian?"

Mum - "Not really, well in the hospital at least. I'm aware that nursing homes haven't been so lucky, but we've been ok. There was a shortage of face fitted masks for a while, but NHS Grampian sourced another supplier and staff were all face fitted again to ensure there were masks that fitted them."

Liam - "9 weeks on, are things improving in the hospital?"

Mum - "Yes, thankfully. The number of people with Covid-19 in the hospital and on ventilators is decreasing and we're now at our lowest level yet. Some routine services are starting to be introduced from next week. It'll take a long time for everything to get up and running again but it's a positive step forward."

Liam - "Out with the hospital, what have you found most difficult?"

Mum – “Home schooling! Or lack of home schooling! Because I work with adults during the week and sick kids at the weekend, I haven’t been around as much as I would’ve liked. That’s been stressful, as I know lots of people have been able to stay at home and give their kids the support they’ve needed. Saying that, I’m very proud of you and your sister and I know you’ve been trying your best. On a positive note, it has been really good for your independence and it’s been nice to come home to a clean house with the hoovering and dishes all done.”

Liam – “Did you agree with Nicola Sturgeon extending the lockdown in Scotland?”

Mum – “Yes, I did. The weekend that Boris Johnson relaxed lockdown in England was the busiest weekend we’ve had at ARI. A&E was out the door with Covid patient’s, so it would’ve made absolutely no sense for Scotland to ease things at that time. Luckily, we’ve hit the peak now so I agree that from next week restrictions should gradually be lifted. People still need to be aware that the risk is still there but as long as we continue to practice good hand hygiene and stay at home if we have any symptoms, hopefully we’ll get there.”

Liam “Do you think we’ll find a vaccine?”

Mum “This is a personal view, but no. There are hundreds of viruses out there that we’ve never found vaccines for; HIV, SARS and even if scientists do discover one, it’s not going to happen over night unfortunately. We can live in hope though.”

Liam – “What are you looking forward to doing most once lockdown is lifted?”

Mum – “Going to the hairdressers to get my roots done. Getting all dressed up and going out to a nice steak restaurant, ideally Vovem, having a nice cocktail and socialising with friends face to face.”

Liam – “Thank you for answering all my questions.”

Mum – “It was my pleasure.”

So, as we prepare for lockdown to be eased, it’s possibly a time for reflection. Britain has shown that if we stick together, anything is possible. Never take anything or anyone for granted, look out for one another and appreciate the small things in life. Do things that make you happy because nobody knows what the future has in store for us.