

COVID-19 CRISIS

NHS DOC'S DIARY IN HOSPITAL FIGHTING VIRUS



SUN MARCH 15

NOT ENOUGH OUTSIDE TESTS



TUES MARCH 17

MASKS ARE A DISGRACE



WEDS MARCH 18

A&E DRUNKS WASTE TIME

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AN NHS doctor today lays bare the reality of life working on the front-line in the battle against Covid-19.

In a special seven-day diary, the A&E medic at a hospital in the North East describes how the NHS is on a "war footing".

He slams the Government for leaving doctors and nurses as "sitting ducks" by not giving them proper protective gear.

And the medic, who wants to remain anonymous, fears ventilators could run out and says drunken revellers add to strain on the overstretched service.

Yet, as he warns the scale of this once-in-a-generation crisis is growing day by day, he says out amazing NHS workers are determined to beat it.

SUNDAY, MARCH 15

ARRIVE to find builders constructing a new hospital within the hospital, just to deal with Covid-19. It stops me dead.

If we were under any illusion as to how big this thing will get, we aren't any longer.

I've been taken off my usual job to help the teams battling coronavirus. We know our rotas will be redundant soon.

Everyone is focused on the same thing. Stopping deaths from the virus.

I'm based on A&E where, as well as dealing with the usual cases, we get patients turning up saying they have Covid-19.

Our intensive care colleagues say most patients being treated at the moment are elderly with underlying health problems.

But word from other trusts is those coming in are getting younger. One had a 40-year-old patient. Frightening.

One hour into my shift and I realise we need more testing in the community. Dozens arrive fearing they have the virus.

One, a first-time mum, is cradling her bump. She is terrified she has got it but she's showing no obvious signs so we send her home. It's so hard but what can we do?

MONDAY

PENSIONER rushed in on a stretcher is taken straight to ICU. She was on oxygen and gasping for breath. The fear on her face is matched by that of her family following behind.

Paramedic says she'd been complaining of feeling worse and worse for days but the advice from 111 was to keep isolating at home.

For now we have ventilators and can stabilise her breathing. We think she will be OK. Thank God.

I think of all the elderly people who don't have a family to keep an eye out for them. How many will die in the days, weeks, months ahead?

Lots more activity in the hospital today. Areas of the intensive care unit are being cleared to make extra room. Operating theatres are being

Under siege... doctors, nurses and staff at busy A&E



HOW BRITAIN LAGS BEHIND

ICU BEDS	HOSPITAL BEDS	DOCTORS
Germany 28,000	Germany 508,000	Germany 351,000
France 7,370	France 400,000	Italy 243,000
Italy 7,200	Italy 192,000	France 209,000
Spain 4,240	UK 157,000	UK 188,000
UK 4,000	Spain 138,000	Spain 138,000

Figures based on data held & compiled by Statista & the World Health Organisation

allocated as overflow areas for patients with Covid-19. Work is going on everywhere to make the place spottless.

One of our team who was in the Army says the measures are the same as you'd see when constructing a field hospital. We know that soon we'll be at war with the virus.

After my shift, I catch Boris Johnson's announcement that we are effectively starting a national lockdown. "At last," I say to myself. But I can't help thinking, is it too late?

TUESDAY

A&E is increasingly becoming a drop-off zone for the angry and confused. Dozens arrive asking to be tested.

But unless they are showing signs of the illness they won't be. Many claim they have a temperature. We check. If it's normal, we have to send them home. A lot say they can't get through to 111. Others say their

GP surgery has closed for visits. I don't get that.

It's obvious we need much more testing in the community. That way, we can get people to self-isolate rather than angrily wandering around potentially infecting others.

The masks which myself and colleagues are being given to wear during this pandemic are a disgrace. We're fighting the planet's deadliest virus with a piece of tissue paper covering our mouths. It's a joke.

Everyone working here is becoming increasingly scared about it.

It's being reported today that the Chancellor will hand out billions to keep the economy afloat. Maybe he could start by giving us the proper equipment to keep us safe. We feel like sitting ducks.

Our family and friends are worried sick. I've become obsessed with keeping clean. Before I step

back inside my front door at night, I clean my shoes in a bucket of water. Then I have a shower before I even speak to my family. I am terrified of passing the virus on.

WEDNESDAY

ON a late tonight and spent most of the shift dealing with drunks in A&E.

Stitched up three blokes who had been fighting. When they arrived, part of me wanted to shake them.

Either that or wheel them to ICU where patients are fighting for their lives.

When I am out and about, I still see people in bars, pubs and queuing for nightclubs. It is madness.

They should be closed down: now! It's really selfish. When is the country going to start taking this virus seriously and stay at home?

Many of my colleagues are also coming under pressure

from their families to self-isolate. They know the heightened chances of us getting it. It's so hard for the families of NHS workers.

THURSDAY

SEVERAL new patients showing signs of the virus are admitted today. One is a long-time heavy smoker aged 50.

His breathing is all over the place. He says he feels as weak now as he did when he was recovering from cancer two years ago. We will definitely need to keep him in. He will need a ventilator to help stabilise him. I call up to ICU. Thankfully we can admit him.

At the moment we have enough ventilators but rumours are spreading about problems nationwide. Colleagues in London are getting so overwhelmed they can't ventilate patients and are having to transfer them.

Everywhere I look there is a cleaner mopping, scrubbing and

colleagues have heard that we may start to run short of ventilators in May. That's only weeks away. We need more now.

For now, my hospital is holding up well and the way everyone is pulling together is inspiring. I've never been prouder to work in the NHS. But how long can we cope with a virus that is growing so fast?

Everyone has seen the pictures of the temporary morgues and Italy's crowded hospitals where doctors are collapsing with exhaustion. No one dares to say it, but we know we could be facing that one day.

FRIDAY

THERE are hidden heroes in this fight against Covid-19 - hospital cleaners. No one mentions them on TV and you won't see their faces in the newspapers but without them this hospital would fall apart.

Everywhere I look there is a cleaner mopping, scrubbing and

spraying. Many are working overtime for no extra money.

One or two should have retired long ago and should probably be self-isolating soon due to their age. But they are proud of their role and carry on despite the huge risks that come with the job they do. Like us, they have flimsy paper masks. If they all got infected, the virus would take control.

The spread of the virus has led to a shake-up in the way we work. Emergency teams now effectively split into two - one half dealing with Covid-19 and the other "everything else".

I help support a woman in her 60s with a serious underlying health condition. For people like her, coronavirus is a ticking time-bomb. Now it's gone off.

Her husband holds her hand loosely, almost looking guilty for doing so. Her breathing is very erratic so she is put on a ventilator. Thankfully, we still have enough. The big problem with this disease is there's no way to beat it. That makes NHS staff feel helpless.

We can operate to save someone, stitch a person up, reattach bits... but when this virus takes hold there is little we can do. That's why for the majority it is much better to try to treat the symptoms at home.

YESTERDAY

TAKES me longer to get to work as the traffic outside supermarkets is insane.

Suddenly realise that I haven't thought about shopping this week. Thank God my family and friends are making sure my fridge has food in it.

Heard a rumour this week that a patient tried to steal hand sanitiser from the toilets. Totally out of order but with the way some are panic-buying I am not that surprised.

Get to work and there are two people there whose bodies ache all over. The pair, in their mid-60s, can't get their breath. They have no energy. It's the soundtrack to the hospital now.

Apparently, colleagues in ICU are using X-rays to help diagnose the condition. It may help speed up the rate of diagnosis. A bit of good news, maybe?

Lots of locums in today - emergency staff parachuted in to plug gaps. The Government is advertising for retired staff to come back and it is clear we will need lots more staff in the weeks and months ahead.

Everyone is talking about the situation down in London. You can feel the tension in the air.

Doctors down there are already talking about the surge in cases and soon having to choose who lives and dies. I've never had to deal with a situation like that and, to be honest, I don't know how I'd cope.

I've got friends who work in the capital and send a couple of them a text message in my break. "How bad is it?", I ask.

But I know the answer. And I know it is only a matter of time before this place is under siege as well.

I hear the ambulance sirens in the distance getting louder and louder and make my way back upstairs.



THURS MARCH 19

SHORTAGES ARE SCARY



FRI MARCH 20

CLEANERS ARE HEROES



SAT MARCH 21

PANIC BUYERS BLOCK WAY IN



Readers' kindness on show

THOUSANDS of caring readers have joined The Sun's Helping Hand Heroes campaign. You have answered the call to carry out acts of kindness amid the bug crisis.

People such as Pranav Bhanot, 31, and his pals who formed the Chigwell Coronavirus Action Group in Essex.

Yesterday, the 80-strong group ran errands for the vulnerable and elderly who are self-isolating.

Next week they are holding a variety show where pensioners can phone in on conference calls to sing songs.

For many, money is tight with jobs at risk.

Why not donate your unused commuting cash to the National Emergencies Trust appeal launched by Prince William at nationalemergenciestrust.org.uk

EMAIL your volunteering tales to featurestories@the-sun.co.uk

BRITS are being urged to give a nationwide round of applause as a thank-you to hard-working NHS staff.

The #ClapForOurCarers campaign aims to get people clapping in gratitude for their work during the coronavirus pandemic.

Everyone is being asked to give the ovation to health staff - whether it is from their living rooms, front doors or gardens - at 8pm this Thursday.

Applause for carers

7 DAYS ON FRONT LINE

IT FELT LIKE DEVIL WAS IN MY BODY: SEE PAGE 13