



The Coronavirus Collective A Student's Perspective

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Article Information

Submitted	31 May 2020
Published	22 June 2020
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As a 5th Year Medical Student, I found myself in a strange position when lockdown began. I was not a Final Year, so was not joining my peers in graduating early. But at the same time, I felt that had enough clinical experience to be an asset on the wards, rather than a liability (my previous experience as a Healthcare Assistant aside). My university was quick to respond to the crisis and suspended our clinical placements. A volunteering scheme was set up in the following weeks, as a result of the strong desire of the medical students to help.

I have to admit that I did not sign up immediately; questions still swirled in my mind if I would actually be useful, and even at that early point it was becoming apparent that BAME individuals had a worse prognosis.

I have two parents to look after, each with several co-morbidities, who I felt needed my presence for both their physical and psychological health. Nevertheless, whilst at home I felt a pull to the wards, whether it was an altruistic desire or base scientific curiosity I am still unsure.

The media's catastrophising machine did not help. After receiving a letter from my GP designating my parents as "Shielded" with provisions of medication and groceries to them, I signed up to volunteer.

My younger brother returned from University and took on my responsibilities as young carer. To prepare for being back on the wards, I completed a COVID e-learning package covering the basics of Donning and Doffing as well the basics of Non-Invasive Ventilation (NIV), and I sat in on the virtual roundtable of discussions with doctors who had prior experience of working in such climates.

The one I most remember was by Imperial college alumnus, Mr David Nott of "War Doctor" fame, who spoke on the importance of senior doctors demonstrating calm leadership. I didn't understand it then, but after two months, I understand it now, given how much my mood reflected that of the junior doctors and consultants under whom I worked on a given day.

Good leadership wasn't limited to the senior clinicians, the kind F1s and nurses took me under their wing and demonstrated patience which was instrumental in me feeling part of the team. Their stress became my stress, whilst their good humour allowed me to express mine. They encouraged me to reflect on my experience and didn't judge my keen spirit.

COVID has been a learning experience for me as a medical student: it has cemented my desire to pursue a career in medicine, reminded me of the importance of my relationships both at home and at work and shown me up close the importance of good clinical leadership through uncharted waters.