



## The Coronavirus Collective

# When a Pandemic Strikes

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### Article Information

Submitted 3 June 2020  
Published 22 June 2020  
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I was in Spain enjoying my annual leave when we first heard about COVID-19 making deep impact on Italy. Italy had gone into lockdown and soon Spain was to declare a National Emergency.

Our first impression was that we would still be able to go home peacefully on our arranged flight which was two days later.

In the next few days, we noted what an impact of Coronavirus Pandemic can be. All the streets were empty, restaurants were getting closed and when we reached airport for our flights, airport looked deserted.

We saw first-hand experience what life amidst a pandemic can be for tourists. We were able to take a flight home, but I soon realized life was about to change.

Reaching back home, next few days, I began experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and started to self-isolate as per National Guidance. Self-isolating was difficult as we were running out of food soon and no delivery slots were available.

I feel really sad when I think about vulnerable groups and how their experience might have been amidst this crisis when they had to depend on others for food delivery. After recovering from symptoms, I was able to join the hospital again.

We were put on emergency rota of 12 hr shifts in order to make sure service didn't suffer as a result of medical staff calling in sick. My rotation into Geriatric Medicine was soon cancelled as was for other trainees throughout the U.K. to avoid disruption to service by rotation of trainees.

In the first few days, the ward soon filled with Covid-19 patients and us as doctors were left amazed by change in PPE guidance every

other day by the Public Health England. Seeing stories of doctors dying in the line of duty due to lack of PPE was distressing, as were stories of BAME communities being more affected due to various factors.

But amidst this gloom, there were some positives. Whether it was various NGOs coming together to help healthcare workers by supplying PPE, or medical students coming together to offer childcare for senior medical staff members; It was amazing to see the role of communities in making sure that healthcare staff never felt alone.

Personally, I benefited a lot from the support of my friends during this crisis. Being away from family is hard for everyone, but if we come together as healthcare workers, we can make this time easier.

During this time in lockdown, I have learnt how to cook and have started cycling back again. I have made sure that I use my time off work to help in the trial of COVID-19 vaccine by volunteering to help at LSTM, Liverpool.

I am not sure if this pandemic is over, but I am sure that this crisis has brought all healthcare workers and communities together with a sense of togetherness.

*Born in Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan, India, Sarthak Bahl completed his MBBS in 2017 from Amritsar. He is currently working as a junior doctor at CT-1 level in Liverpool. He is also involved with BMA Mersey JDC as a rep to consultants' committee.*