

## Deployed to ED – A Surgeons View. COVID 19 – The Other Victims.

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My day job is as a Colorectal Surgeon, so my Emergency Medicine knowledge has not been updated since my trainee days, and so it is with some trepidation that I start my first shift in the department.

I have volunteered for this but all the same I am nervous about what I am going to be asked to face during the next 12 hours.

Arriving at 7.00am, I don my scrubs and start to climb into the PPE I will be wearing. Earlier in the week I had attended a four-hour induction and update in the procedures within the Emergency Department and my mind is on that, I talk to no-one, and complete my transformation into Emergency Department Surgeon by putting on the Face Mask, god its tight. The label on my apron reads “team Leader” though I feel confident I can do my job; I am fearful and worried about the numbers of people we potentially will get through the front door and if we can cope.

I report to the Hot Zone and will alternate between this and the Majors area. I think of myself as a “floating surgeon” and it briefly conjures up an image of me moving from one area to another without walking anywhere. My instruction is taken from the Emergency Consultant manning the floor – “the Captain” and I recognize him by the “C” armband he is wearing.

I am in the Hot Majors when I see the first patients, I am hoping that the influx from triage will remain steady, but I notice that my heart beat has started to climb and small beads of perspiration are forming on my forehead as more and more patients flow through the doors, and the pace quickens, my mind flashes back to the training and treatment guidelines, we see very poorly patients – definitely Covid 19 infected – poor patients, they are aware of their condition and the pitiful look they give you tells you all you need to know – I need your help,

can you help me? I will do my very, very, best, as will all my colleagues I say to them and myself. Every one of my colleagues knows and understands why they are here and we work as a team, united in fighting this Covid 19 enemy, whilst comforting, easing pain, reassuring wherever and whenever we can, we forget the fear for ourselves and become almost robotic in following the procedures, remaining calm, never a raised voice, just quiet determination to get the job done.

I get a break, I take on fluid, and give myself the luxury of looking at the time 3 hours remain, 9 hours have passed since I started this morning where has the time gone? The phone rings, trauma call in 15 mins, I go to the donning are and put on PPE and make my way to Resus, I am calm now and although I am on high alert and adrenaline is pumping, I wait along with my team ready to receive the patient, we have a count and everyone shouts out their role – it’s difficult to hear the muffled replies through all of masks and visors we are all wearing.

The patient is handed over by the paramedics, again communication is difficult, through the “space suit” garb we are all wearing. The patient is a victim of the Covid 19 epidemic but not presenting with the normal symptoms - a penetrating injury to the stomach, lockdown leading to a domestic violence incident. Patient is resuscitated and taken immediately to theatre, I follow on to theatres – now I am back to my day job, everything takes longer, we have to adhere strictly to the infection control rules – I have to carefully remove all my PPE from the ED department then go to theatres to again scrub and apply protective equipment, this is where I normally feel at home, my comfort zone, so to speak but its somehow different, I look around at my colleagues, all of us dressed in PPE and hope that the extra time it has all taken does not put the patient’s life beyond our capabilities. The surgery is a success, the

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patient is stable, I feel relief and slightly euphoric, a kind of natural high, I say thank you to all my team and realize my shift is done – I've been here for almost 14 hours.

I De-scrub and feel my shoulders sag as I sit in the changing room, reflecting on what has been a baptism of fire in to the Covid 19 war. My face is hurting from the mask and face shield.

I realize that although I have spent many years as a consultant surgeon and trauma calls are the norm, you become a doctor and pursue a career in your chosen specialty because you want to

make people well, it takes dedication, and perseverance and years of hard work, but never do you feel that you are in a situation where your life is at risk – Covid 19 changed that for everyone who works within the NHS probably for ever – the only comparison I can make as a medic, what our soldiers must feel when they go off to war. I am in awe of all my colleagues – nurses, ambulance teams, porters, everyone who plays a part, their stoic determination to do and be the best they can to help all victims of Covid 19 no matter how it has affected them.

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