

We share three, different stories of how Christian health professionals have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and what God has been doing in and through them



VOICES

FROM THE FRONTLINE - THE UK

From the end of March to the end of May, we recorded over 40 testimonies from CMF members and other Christians working in the healthcare

in the UK and overseas about their experiences during the first peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are three of their stories.

THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

Ruth works as a paediatric OT in Oxfordshire



A lot of our caseload had to shut down when lockdown started. For the kids that were physically healthy with only moderate learning difficulties, it was mostly OK. But those who were more vulnerable were put onto a special caseload managed by technical and therapy instructors, only coming to me if there was anything that I need to make a call on.

Many parents really struggled, and the children were very anxious, especially the older ones. They already deal with a lot of anxiety, fear and difficulty in their lives, so something like this caused even more worry. It was also very isolating for them – they missed school and their routines.

Early in lockdown, I got drafted across into a community therapy service working alongside the District Nurses. One thing that was quite a sobering was when we were given training in the verification of death. This is something that we never do as therapists. A District Nurse did the training. At the end of the training, you could have heard a pin drop in the department. But the District Nurse said, 'Any problems, just take the time, go outside, give us a phone call. We're all there, and we all want to help each other'.

I believe that God sends us into situations where

we can't openly say 'I'm a Christian' or give the gospel, but we can pray. I heard what people were saying to me in person or over the phone, and I heard the anxiety in their voice. So, I would just pray. The Bible says 'The prayers of the righteous are heard by God' so, I believe that in all the situations we were going into God had a purpose and a reason, maybe more than we'll ever know.

There were several verses on which I was reflecting and meditating during that time – Psalm 121, 'I look to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.' And I thank God that he's given me help. I ask God for wisdom, and as it says in James 1:5 'if anybody asks for wisdom of me, I will give it liberally and without reproach'. There were times when I was saying to God 'I don't know, I feel like I'm out of my depth right now, but I know that you'll give me that wisdom'. As I was driving around making home visits, I would meditate on Philippians 4 where it talks about anxiety and praying and also encouraging us to 'rejoice, and I say again rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all' and I just thought – well, if I can only do one thing, then I'll go in with a gentle spirit

THE ITU NURSE

Adi was working in a unit for suspected COVID-19 patients



Life was very different in ITU at that time. Mentally we were all apprehensive. It was tough to know that you might get an infection from your patient, and yet you still go and care for them.

There is a dark side to PPE. When you wear a tight mask around your face, a hat, a face shield, a gown, two pairs of gloves, and something to protect your shoes, it's tough. You have to stay in that unit for twelve and a half hours. It is physically draining. You feel hypoxic because you can't breathe normally, and you are constantly sweating. You can't even go to the loo because your patients are terribly sick. They are on maximum life support so you can't take your eyes off that monitor.

Yet, I found help in Scripture. I was reading through Matthew 8:1-4. He went down and touched a leper, and he healed him and spoke to him a few words. That was really encouraging for me. Jesus was defying the norm by caring for the sick, even though they are infectious. Jesus touched a leper, which was not acceptable at that time. We were going in and helping people in need who others feared to touch. That gave me a beautiful understanding of how we can show Christ through our work. Whatever we are doing as Christians in the healthcare professions, we can reflect him.

THE INTENSIVIST

Audrey is a consultant anaesthetist in ICU



We had some fantastic conversations about God and the fact that Jesus is alive... And they came so naturally because of the bizarre circumstance that we found ourselves in

It feels like it's been a bit of a roller coaster ride with real mountaintops of fun and good things and valley dips of really awful stuff. I work in a twelve-bedded ICU, with twelve level three beds and eight level two beds. I usually work part-time, but during the COVID peak, I was in the unit full-time, as were all my colleagues. We were fortunate because we've got a big anaesthetic department, so folks who don't normally do ICU, including most of our trainees, were just drafted into ICU. I think by the first couple of weeks, we had 17 people on per shift, which made it just about manageable.

Most of us didn't know each other, especially the trainees, and then we were working in full PPE. So, we would find ourselves on shifts saying, 'Oh, hello. I'm so, and so who are you?'. So, we would write on the front of our PPE who we were, what our training grades or professions were.

I think one of the hardest things for our whole team to cope with was that there were no relatives. There's no visiting at all in our hospital. The government gave ICUs iPads. So, we were able to send little videos to families. They weren't in real-time, but we could take a video of the patient, then send that off and they could make a little text comment back to us. And that was lovely.

But when people died, it was tough because the family couldn't be there. We held phones to dying people's ears as family members poured out their hearts. And, you know, we've had staff weeping at the bedside. Audibly weeping in the background as family members wept to their loved one that they knew that they would never see again.

I have found myself standing with nurses sobbing by the bedside, a trainee sobbing across from us and me in tears too. And normally you know my instinct would be to give everyone a hug. But you couldn't even get close enough to put your hand on their arm.

Our nursing staff have just been fantastic. I cannot praise them enough. They did far more time in PPE than we, as medical staff did. They've all worked outside of their usual areas, and they have just been amazing.

I find myself on repeated occasions, speaking to nursing and medical staff, saying, 'do you know when I read my Bible, and I hear about how Jesus lived and his sacrificial life and his selfless giving – the stuff I've seen from you guys has, has reminded me of him'. And it's true. These are folk who haven't had any real personal experience of faith before, reminded me of what selfless giving to another person is like. And some folk have just laughed and said, 'for goodness sake, keep your Jesus out of it!'

But I was working most of Easter weekend, and we had some fantastic conversations about God and the fact that Jesus is alive. God is with us by his Spirit because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was amazing to be able to have those conversations with people. And they came so naturally because of the bizarre circumstance that we found ourselves in.

We were praying together at seven o'clock most nights with CMF's COVID-1900Prayer. Several staff had timers on their phones to remind them to join us. These are folks who have never prayed before!

May the Lord keep us enthusiastic about simply chatting the gospel in the rough and tumble. And in the wonderful ability we've had to work together as a team, may we bring the truth of God's kingdom to our colleagues, patients and their families.

You can hear all our voices from the frontline podcasts on the CMF website at cmf.li/COVID19VFF or via our podcast feed at cmf.li/39WJGsC