

my trip to... UCLH ICU

Enpei Zhang describes working in a COVID ICU over Easter



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The pandemic sadly means that it has been hard to travel overseas during the past year. So instead of a report of far-flung travel, we report on some different clinical experience much closer to home.



This year I was immensely privileged to be able to support the wonderful Intensive Care Unit staff at University College London Hospitals (UCLH) for six weeks during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was an unforgettable experience; it taught me so much, both medically and spiritually. I would like to take this opportunity to offer some key reflections on my time in ICU.

As third year preclinical medical students, we were surprised when we received a call for our help – we had yet to set foot in a hospital in a clinical capacity. I remember thinking that the situation must have been grave to warrant this request. Still, I was wholly unprepared for the chills that went through me when I stepped for the first time into my designated Covid ICU bay.

Before me were eight patients hooked up to ventilators, feeding tubes, urinary catheters, and several different IV lines which were infusing muscle relaxants, anaesthesia, and analgesia. This was the first time I truly began to comprehend the overwhelming possibility of death and the effort

that was being invested here in trying to prevent it. The ICU nurses told me a shocking statistic: 30-40 per cent of patients with acute respiratory distress who are ventilated would die, despite all the life-sustaining resources available in the ICU environment.

The power and fear of death was no longer simply an abstract concept to me. Now I was witnessing first-hand its terrifying reality.

However, over the Easter weekend, at a time when we usually meditate on Jesus' power to overcome death, I found within my own heart a much deeper understanding of exactly what that means. Before, my abstract understanding of death meant that my comprehension of Jesus' triumph over death was also hypothetical. However, as I came to grips with the reality of death, I saw a glimpse of the true significance of the resurrection.

In spite of the suffering that has ensued over the past year, this Easter I find within my heart a renewed sense of hope that differs profoundly from Easter's past – and that is something for which I truly give thanks. ■