



THAT ONE TIME...

OCTOBER 2020

INTRODUCTION

Alan Gilsean

There is a real urgency to these new writings, these dispatches from the frontline of Covid-19. One can feel the effect of our current global pandemic pulsing through each vital sentence in a way that we rarely get from the daily figures, nor from the endless public debate and analysis. For here are stories and poems that take you inside it all - the fear and determination, the selflessness and the profound appreciation of all that generosity of spirit - the real stuff of an island in the throes of crisis. Oh, and there's heroism here too, amongst these frontline families, although I'm hesitant to use the word.

For no one inside these virtual pages claims to be a hero. They are just doing their jobs, as they often tell us. Or simply doing what they imagine to be right. What used to be called 'the decent thing.' The stuff of community and solidarity. Of looking after your own and your neighbours. But it's hard not to see something heroic in it all, unavoidable and essential though the work may be. And there are young people here too - brave and appreciative and understanding - belying the stereotype and telling their tales too.

But, above all, there's love here. Shining like a watermark lifted up to the light. For these writings both document and crystallise the times that we're all living through. That makes them all seem quite remarkable. Missives tossed like messages in a bottle on stormy seas. All we have to do is reach out and grasp them.

Then wash our hands and read. With gratitude.

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MY EXPERIENCE

Alecia
Age 12
Co. Dublin

Hi, my name is Alecia and this is my Covid 19 experience.

It was a Thursday and I was at school. The day was about to end when they announced that school was closing due to Covid 19 restrictions until further notice. I remember walking home with my friend; we were so happy and excited. We were talking about how we were going to go outside and play with each other every day. A few days passed and I finished all the work my teacher had given me to do at home. I was rushing my work so that I could finish it quickly and then play. I thought that it would be so much fun, not having to do any work, waking up late and playing games all day long. It took about a week and half for all my happiness of having no school to drain out. Soon I was missing all my friends, going to school, basically my everyday life.

We were about one month in quarantine and my mom was working in a Covid ICU as a nurse at that time. There was a whole process she needed to go through before actually entering the house after being at the hospital and she was self-isolating at home. My family was very new to not having my mom around as much and it was pretty scary. All the bad stories from different countries made us more worried. About a week later, her hospital gave her accommodation at a hotel, so then we weren't able to see her at all. We missed her so much and hoped and prayed to God to please keep her safe. Many of her friends from work were falling sick. Mom always reassured us that everything was going to be fine when we spoke to her every day. My little brother could not understand any of this!

Life went on like this for a while until she moved out of Covid ICU. During this time, my dad struggled a lot to look after us. I didn't realise it then but looking back I don't know what we would have done without my dad. He did his very best to fill in the position of my mom as well as having to work from home and he got us all through the tough times.

After two months of staying at home, I was officially going crazy. It was so hard staying inside, especially when it was so sunny. Life wasn't as difficult once my mom moved from the ICU. It was much better because she didn't need to do the same long process of staying in a room isolating herself. But she still did need to take precautions, like having a shower straight after she got home, wearing a mask to work, at work and from work. These precautions were definitely much easier than when she was self-isolating, though.

When quarantine started, I thought it was going to last for two or three weeks, or a month at the most. But when we were hitting two to three months of it, I started to lose hope. I realised that there wasn't much chance of shops or schools opening any time soon. But then, just when I thought it was going to be like this for the rest of the year, I saw the news that there was a huge drop in the number of cases and deaths. That was a sign of hope to me. Soon shops other than restaurants were opening. We started easing out of the restrictions.

We have completed Phase One of easing restrictions and Phase Two will soon come to an end. I am extremely happy about the coming of Phase Three, which allows us to travel from county to county. This means I will be able to see my cousins and spend time with them. I can't wait!

When I look back, it upsets me because of all the things I missed this year. I am in 6th class so this was my last year in primary school. The last few months of school were supposed to be epic because there was the confirmation, school tour to Carlingford, our graduation and much more. But then I think of all we have been through and it brings a smile to my face. Right now, the whole world is going through a pandemic and knowing that we are pretty close to the end is a huge achievement after we have been in quarantine for four months.

Even though I didn't have the greatest time of my life in these past four months, I think it was good that everyone got a break to think over everything. I definitely think that people are going to appreciate the world more. We all did a lot more gardening, ate more home-made food and learned to do more cooking and baking too! Yes, and lot more time together as a family! Hopefully when everything is back in full swing people will take care of the Earth much better than before. Definitely this year's Father's Day was really special as I knew my dad is a real hero like the frontline workers.

FRONTLINE WORKER

Bronagh
Age 12
Co. Down

Hi, I'm Emma. I am a nurse who works in the Covid 19 department. Working in the department is scary, but it also makes me proud, knowing that I have the privilege of helping patients and their families at this awful time when they are at their lowest and separated from those they love. This virus is new to everyone, and even the health professionals are terrified at his time. Sometimes I don't even get an hour of sleep working long shifts day and night. I'm even risking my family's life by going home when I can, I am so scared of bringing the virus home to them.

Let me give you a wee insight into my working day.

I wake up early in the morning to get ready and eat breakfast before work. When I get to the hospital I put on my mask, hand sanitiser and gloves. This is what they call PPE - we wear these to protect us.

Once I'm ready, I go to my first patient called Jimmy - he was the first Covid 19 patient to arrive into the hospital. He is 71 years old and also suffers from asthma. He loves us talking to him and telling him all about what is happening with his family at home.

Three hours later

After four hours of work it is lunch time. I often go to the tasty café just a few streets from the hospital for a takeaway sandwich and coffee. After I have finished my lunch, I walk back to the hospital. It has been six hours since lunch but I still have to work till one o'clock in the morning. Suddenly it's nine o'clock and I decide to have a snack. I demolish the bar so quickly that the time hasn't even changed, and now it is time to get back to work.

Five hours later

It is finally one in the morning and time to go home. The protective gear has to be taken off - I get changed, pack up my stuff, get into the car and drive home. When I get home, I tiptoe up the stairs so noone can hear me coming. I change into my pyjamas and hop into bed for a good night's sleep.

The next morning

It's eight o'clock, time to go to another day's work, but at least I will finish a bit earlier, at eight o'clock in the evening. Other than that, it's the same old routine.

Frontline workers risk their lives for us, they risk their families lives for us. They make sure every patient is given the best treatment possible, hoping to cure them if they can, even if it means risking their lives. We all must respect them, care for them and listen to them.

Given what they are doing for us, the least we can do is stay at home. Please listen to them - we can only get through this if we all work together.

Here is a wee poem for these amazing people.

Frontline Workers...

F = Free us from pain, care for us till the end.

R = Realise that we can only get through this if we work together.

O = On long shifts day and night just so we can be cared for.

N = Never leave our sides, care for us day and night.

T = Tell us we'll be all right, keep us connected with our families.

L = Leave their own families to care for ours.

I = I know with their dedication our loved ones will be given the best treatment.

N = Never give up, even when the going gets tough.

E = Even when we lose hope, they never leave us.

Frontline workers are always there so we must care for them as they care for us. They deserve so much respect from us for what they do.

THE UNICORN AND THE CHILDREN

Cara
Age 8
Co Dublin

Once there was a happy herd of unicorns. The unicorns loved to make rainbows and play on them. One day a unicorn called Eliza made a rainbow and went on it. As she trotted along, her hoof slipped and she fell. She woke up and found herself in an odd land. She looked around and heard something. It was children laughing and giggling.

She trotted over and saw children playing. They saw her and gasped in amazement and then something strange happened. The unicorn spoke in a human voice.

"I am lost, please help me," she said.

"Of course we can," the children said cheerfully.

One of them said, "Hey! I think there is a way that we can get you home from here. Follow us to the end of the rainbow."

The unicorn followed them. At last they came to the end of the rainbow.

"Here you go," they said.

"Goodbye!" the unicorn said back. After that, the unicorn would make rainbows and trot back over to visit the children.

One day a man was walking in the forest and he saw the unicorn with the children. He made a plan. He was going to capture the unicorn! Don don don! He went to his crew and told them his plan. They all agreed, apart from one nice, kind gentleman called Sam. Sam was determined to stop the plan and save the unicorn from the crew.

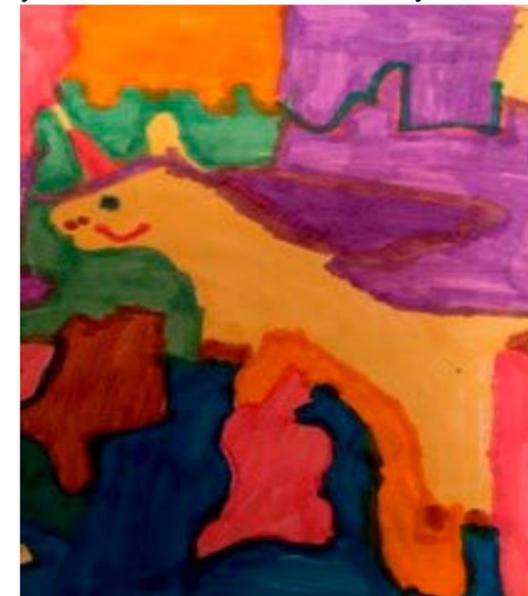
"We will go at 9:45 tomorrow night," said one of them. This was great for Sam to know. He was going to go at eight o'clock and set a trap for the crew. It was a big plan.

Today is the day, thought Sam when he woke up the next morning. He could not wait to set his trap to catch the crew. He got some rope, a net and tape. Later, he set out to go and set the trap. He tied rope to the bottom of a tree. Then he attached the net to the tree top. This was attached to the rope on the ground. He made sticky paper from the tape and put it on the ground and hid. 9:45pm, the crew arrived. They saw the trap and jumped over it!

"Silly Sam," they said. "Thinks he can outsmart us!" They all laughed.

Sam was smart, however, and the trap they had jumped over was an illusion. The real one had been made with invisible paint. Sam was really smart - he knew that the crew had to stay two metres apart from each other because of Covid 19 and social distancing. There were four of them so he made the invisible rope eight metres long. They fell into the invisible net that was attached to this rope and were trapped.

The unicorn was delighted to be saved. She gave Sam a golden horn to talk to animals. She gave the children a gem so they could visit her whenever they liked.



MY MUMMY THE HERO

Darragh
Age 9
Co. Antrim

I know everyone thinks that they have the best mummy, but I truly do. During this pandemic, I learned how hard my mummy works.

My mummy always says you do not go into nursing for the money; it is because she loves her job.

During the past fifteen weeks, my mummy has gone to work each morning and come home late at night. My daddy has the garage set up for Mummy to take her work uniform off. We are not allowed to run and cuddle Mummy as we always would. Even when she is showered we are not allowed to cuddle.

Mummy sits separate from us, even at dinnertime. We know this is to keep us safe, but it is very, very hard. I never knew what my mummy really did at work until now. It upsets me when she comes home crying. She tries to put on a brave face, but I can hear behind closed doors talking to my daddy (I am a kid after all).

My daddy is working from home and he is very busy as well, plus home schooling (Daddy, you're doing great). It has been a team effort in the McStravick household.

On my mummy's days off, she makes it as special as possible, from fun dinners and movie nights out the back to family weekly quiz night. When she works her long days, we do a bike ride or an evening hike with my daddy, which I love.

I know the importance of family life, friends and school. I am missing what I once knew as 'normal life'.

I long for the days to see my grandparents, my family and my classmates. I have missed them all so much. But I know and understand firsthand that by staying home, I am playing my part in keeping people safe.

My mummy has been working a lot recently. I have never cried when she had to work on Christmas Day, Easter Sunday or bank holidays. I know this is her job and that she loves me. She has never missed a school play, sports day or school assembly. She may miss the odd hurling training or match, but I can forgive her.

All NHS workers are working so hard. As my mummy would say, on each shift you're walking into the unknown.

I want to thank you, Mummy, all for your care and compassion to your patients. You're putting yourself at risk each day.

Mummy, I am proud of you and I love you - and please stay safe.

Your son Darragh xx



MY LOCKDOWN

Eimear

Age 11

Northern Ireland

Hi, my name is Eimear and right now we are in 2019. It's New Year's Eve and everyone is counting down: ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one... **Happy New Year.**

So, let's start in 2020 shall we?

One day the news came on and it wasn't pleasant news. My mum and dad had already told me that there was a virus spreading called coronavirus. At that time, I didn't worry much about it. Then, on the 23rd of March, we went on **LOCKDOWN.**

Lockdown is where you're not allowed out of your house, so you're basically locked in. Luckily, I live in the countryside, so it isn't too bad for me!

The bad thing for me is my mum works in the hospital, so she must go to work. It might just be me, but she seems to spend all her time in the shower.

When we went on lockdown, the school closed so we had our work sent home. Every day, sunny or not, we have to do work. Not all days though - we get weekends and bank holidays off. In May, I got so excited because it was my one and only 11th Lockdown Birthday 2020.

My mummy had told me a few weeks before my birthday that there was a surprise. I begged and begged for them to tell me, but they wouldn't. One day I was down in the dumps, so they told me. It was **dun dun dun...** to sleep in a tent outside in our garden! I screamed with joy.

So one night we set out to camp. We toasted marshmallows on a homemade fire and watched a movie. At three in the morning I awoke - I couldn't stay in the tent any longer. I asked my mum could we go inside and she agreed. We went into the house and got into bed. Aww, my bed never felt so good! Well, that's that event, so let's move onto the next.

It's Tuesday at six in the morning and it's my birthday! I ran into parents' room, but they said, "go back to bed." But I couldn't sleep so I went down and had breakfast. A short while passed and I decided it was time I wake up my sister Aimee. We watched TV until the rest of the family woke up. When they eventually did, we had breakfast... I know are thinking 'more breakfast!'... well, I was very hungry. Now, time for presents.

I got some lovely things including a Boomf card. This is a special card that works when you pull a tab. It is supposed to pop and confetti comes out to reveal a box. I didn't wait long - I ripped it open and flung the confetti up in the air. Five seconds later it popped! That was a great event, but let's move on to the next.

So, there's what you could call a new tradition. On both sides of the family, we started online quizzes every weekend. Each family would try their best to answer all the questions right (you probably already knew to try answer all the questions right!). The winner is named the 'winner,' but there's no real prize there, if you ask me!

I was excited when it came to my turn. My sister Orlaith did it with me. Let me tell you something that none of the quizzers know - I only made up six questions out of 80. However, in my opinion they were the best six.

My best best friend is Maria and I miss her soooooo much. I miss going to her house and her coming to mine. Most important of all, we are still keeping in touch by messages and voice memos. Maria's sister Isla is my sister Orlaith's best friend, so we are kind of like a friend group. I find this genius, but you might not...I call us Sister Sets! As you might have been wondering, yes, we do have nicknames for each other. I am Eims, Maria is Ree, Orlaith is Ozzy and well, I just call Isla, Isla.

Now since I'm only halfway through lockdown I can't really tell you what the whole year was about because... well that's future, but I will always try my best to get the time to write part two. I have always daydreamed that through writing this that it might end up in a shop. One thing I do know is they don't publish books this tiny.

Thank you for listening or reading. 😊

SEAN'S LOCKDOWN DIARY

Sean
Age 11
Co. Down

Hi, my name is Sean Feenan. I live in Ballyhorman and I am eleven. We are currently in lockdown due to Covid-19, a disease which affects your lungs and breathing. Everyone is saying it started in China. We have been off school since St Patrick's week – that's twelve weeks ago.

It's fun being off school, I get to lie in longer than eight o'clock as I don't have to get up for the bus to go to school. Our mums are teaching us now at home - sometimes it's okay, other times it's not!

I am in the middle of reading *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* by Roald Dahl. It's a follow-on from my favourite film, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. I am not really watching anything on television, but I do watch my favourite YouTubers and gamers on YouTube.

We are all expected to stay indoors to keep ourselves, others and the NHS safe. My mum goes to the shop every couple of days to get essential foods like bread, milk and meat for our dinner. We have to stay two metres away from other people when queueing at the shop and only a couple of people are allowed in at a time.

My friends and I contact each other by phone or we play games on our PlayStations and Xbox-es, where we can talk to each other without going to each other's houses. I miss being able to go down and see my grannies and grandads - they live in Kilclief and Downpatrick. My Uncle Frank died in England with Covid-19 and my Granda Quinn can't get over to see him or the rest of his family.

Hopefully this will be all over soon and we will be allowed back to doing what we enjoy. But we can all look back on this time and know that we have been a part of history, which people will talk about in years to come.

When lockdown is over, I will firstly go to see all my elderly relatives and give them an enormous hug. Then I will have a barbecue with my nana and grandad and will smell the sausages cooking and hear them sizzling and see my grandparents' bright flowers and colourful garden.

After, I will see all of my friends, and play with them all day, listening to their shrieks and laughter. Then it will be time for holidays, and I will feel the hot sun on my back and hear the waves and the seagulls.

Afterwards, I will see my teacher and thank her for the fun work and I will be delighted to see her because she is very kind and I miss her a lot.

Lastly, I will go on a hike in Wicklow to see the hills and hear the deer and play in the streams.

Oh, I just can't wait until lockdown is over!

WHEN THE LOCKDOWN IS OVER

Tomás
Age 11
Co Dublin

MY SUPER HERO

Tom
Age 7
Co. Waterford

Today my mam dressed for battle,
To fight an enemy I cannot see,
She is so kind and so brave,
As people's lives, she fights to save.
She is committed, right from the start,
She is positive, with a loving heart,
She stays up all night,
So she can put in a fight.
She works her fingers to the bone,
She is glad to see her home,
With masks and gowns, she battles on,
Until the danger is all gone.
If I need a pat,
She will do just that,
She will know what to say,
But most of all when to stay.
You are more than a nurse,
You are more than my mam,
You are more than my friend,
Give me a biro.
You are my Super Hero.



A VIEW FROM MY WINDOW

Caitlin
Age 12
Co Antrim

When I look out my window
At what I can see,
At first everything looks the same
Normal to me.

But wait! Something's not right
There is something amiss,
The outside world seems so quiet
Has life been dismissed?

Where are the people?
Where is the noise?
No dog walkers,
No kids with their toys.

The streets are so empty
Life has stood still,
To protect us from a virus
That is making us so ill.

The shops have all shut
Except for a few,
But if you must go
Be ready to queue!

Parents working from home
We can't go to school,
No playing with friends
The parks are not full.

Our neighbours now strangers
That we rarely see,
Except from their doorstep
When they wave at me.

No one's out working
Except for a few,

Our essential key workers
Heroes in blue!

When I look out my window
The view seems the same,
But I wonder will normal
Ever return again?

THE YEAR 2020

Caitlin
Age 8
Co Laois

The year was Twenty Twenty
I had just turned eight
The year started out as normal
In fact it started great

My mam had had a baby
On January twenty-third
A baby girl called Stevie
I don't know if you heard

February passed as normal
Nothing was really strange
It was from Friday, March thirteenth
That things began to change

All schools in Ireland closed their doors
For two weeks we were told
A virus had come to Ireland
Very dangerous for the old

St. Patrick's Day was cancelled
All sports and concerts too
No one was allowed to travel
Not even to the zoo

Ireland began a lockdown
At home we had to stay
We could not visit family
With friends we could not play

We had to keep our distance
Had to wash our hands a lot
All to keep each other safe
This was our only shot

Our schoolwork came in daily

It really brought us joy

We had a virtual classroom

With pals and Mr McEvoy

Me and momma started cooking

Brownies and cookies were the best

I would measure all ingredients

And momma did the rest

The bishop sent out notice

Communions another casualty

Our special day all but gone

Another time it will have to be

So we won't be back to school this year

At least not till September

For years to come, for our whole lives

Twenty Twenty we will remember.

I SHOULD BE AT SCHOOL RIGHT NOW

Declan
Age 12
Co. Dublin

I should be at school right now,
And not stuck here at home.

I should be at class right now,
And not via my phone.

I should be at lunch right now,
And not eating alone.

I should be at yard right now,
And not just left to roam.

I should be at school right now,
And not reading this poem.

FLIP FLOP FEELINGS

Ella
Age 10
Co. Derry

We can't really go anywhere
Not the beach, or the fair.
I feel like I'm in jail,
Or trapped in the ocean. Where do I sail?

But it's not that bad,
I'm actually quite glad.
I get to spend more time with my family.
I love them and they love me.

I Facetime my mate,
He is really great.
I play football a lot
Sometimes I lose the plot.

I might have a good day or a bad day,
Sometimes things don't go my way.
Mostly it's quite fun,
I love soaking up the sun.



Dear Coronavirus,

Stop spreading

Cancelling all the weddings

On the newspaper you're the top heading

No meeting up, just letter sending

Make sure no virus lending

Texts are pending

Immune systems are defending

I am so bored

Please stop this Lord

Please stop this Lord

DEAR CORONAVIRUS

Geno
Age 11
Co. Dublin

LET'S STAND TOGETHER

Grace
Age 12
Co. Longford

Coronavirus can make you ill
But sadly they have not come up with a vaccine pill
You could end up in intensive care
But rather be in your bedroom lair

All you have to do is wash your hands
In between your fingers and palms
And if you want wear a mask
All it is a simple task

Life's pressure could be lighter
But restrictions are getting tighter
But at the end of the this
The light is getting brighter

Lastly you can sigh
You can cry
But remember if you're careless you could die

FREEDOM

Jack
Age 12
Co. Clare

All I want is freedom.
Is that too much to ask.
All I want is freedom.
To pass the sliotar hand to hand.

To excitement of all the matches puts adrenalin in my veins.
To hear the crowd in Cusack Park would surely make my day.
Just to see the cup being lifted overhead one more time.
And have that sweet smell of sweaty victory.
A memory of a lifetime.

But since we're all locked up,
Our dreams and plans are on hold.
I close my eyes and remember all the Cratloe dreams of old.

OUR SUPERHEROES WITHOUT CAPES

Kaila
Age 12
Co. Antrim

When the world is locked away,
And a virus roams the air,
When we stay confined in our homes with caution,
Someone is always there!

You may not see them all the time,
Only when it is essential,
But when you do, then you will see,
Their work is very influential!

They are our key workers,
And immediately with any indication,
They strive to make sure we are safe,
Working for and feeding the nation!

Without them there, what would we do?
Our life and economy would fail!
But luckily, they are still there for us all,
They work hard and avail!

Our NHS saving countless lives,
Our shops who keep us fed,
Our postmen still delivering for us,
Businesses thinking ahead!

The rainbows of hope that shine crystal-clear,
Showing their support and reflecting ours,
You can show it in any way possible,
Baking banana bread or displaying colourful flowers!

We clapped every Thursday at 8pm,
Our cheers flooded the night sky,
But even now that it is finished,
Our praise still doesn't die!

And when this is all over,
They will still be doing what's right,

Now future generations will look back on their work,
Hearing the stories of each day and night.

COVID 19

Leia
Age 9
Co. Dublin

Covid 19 is quite major,
that's because it's a real danger.
Even though the sun is shining, I still feel a little blue
Coronavirus is real mean, yeah coronavirus - I'm talking to you.
I haven't seen my friends in a while
at least the vaccine is on trial.
I was going to go on holiday
but that got cancelled anyway.

All my aunties and uncles, grannies and grandads and cousins,
yeah I know I have dozens,
they are all working hard these days,
but they are working hard in many different ways.
My uncle was wearing PPE gear
now that deserves a cheer, hear hear!
My aunty is a doctor and she's reinforcing standards in nursing homes
I feel like she should be in protective domes.
My aunty works in a GP's clinic
these days that's not a job I'd like to mimic.
My other aunty is working in a hospital because she's a nurse
I dont know how coronavirus can get any worse!
My other aunty is an SNA,
trying to bring people back to school to stay.
My aunty exports goods to Japan were her family lives
but it will be a while until she sees her relatives.

My grannies and grandads are trying to cocoon
I hope I get to see them soon.
My uncle is a builder and a fixer
he also uses a cement mixer.
My uncle works in Alcon Eyecare,
so your eyes don't get fuzzy when you stare.
My other uncle gives internet to those around
all these jobs are harder than they sound.
My dad works for the government, putting computers in the cloud

so working from home can be allowed.

My mom works in risk management with funds

but it's not going as well as it normally runs

because the stock market took a hit

which meant she had to work harder by more than just a bit.

I don't know how much more I can take

they have to get people back to school for my sake.

My house is like a playful tune, but sometimes it goes off key

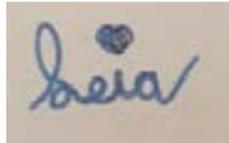
Coronavirus is really hard, especially for kids like me.

Sometimes I dream that coronavirus is done

and for now ,the people of Ireland have nearly won!

Continue to wash your hands and wear a mask

and together we will complete this difficult task.



WAKE ME UP WHEN THE NIGHTMARE ENDS

Molly
Age 12
Co Down

It seems such a long time ago,
When Boris first appeared
He spoke about a strange new virus
And how it must be feared.

He told me I can't go out
Or visit my family and friends
He talked as if this was it!
The world was going to end.

He said that only certain people
Were allowed out during the day
Nurses, doctors, postal workers
Only key workers he would say.

It seemed to me a strange new world
Stuck behind a pane of glass
Getting bored doing the same old thing
As the hours they slowly passed.

School is closed but the work goes on
It gets sent out on a daily basis
The teachers tell us they miss us loads
And can't wait to see our smiling faces.

Mum walks in, lets out a sigh
Drops her school bags on the floor,
I rush and give her a great big hug
And tell her I love her more and more

Homework done, I run outside
To jump on my trampoline
But my dad shouts loudly after me
"No play until your room is clean!"

"Is this real or just a dream?"
I text this to my friends

QUARANTINE

Tara
Age 11
Co. Dublin

The whole world is stuck in quarantine
With nothing at all to do,
While some people handle it well
Others are feeling blue.

Some have new hobbies
Some face great bores
But one thing we all have in common
Is we all long to go through our front doors.

We all should thank the HSE
For keeping us safe and well
But we all need to wash our hands
Before children start to miss the sound of the school bell

Some people are running low on money
We all know working from home isn't fun
But we all need to stand together
Because soon coronavirus will be done.

THE BALL OF THE SKY

Thomas
Age 9
Co. Waterford

Through the sky a ballroom dance.
Came overflowing down from the sky.
The clouds overpowered the sun.
As all at once the frozen lakes of heaven overflow their banks.
The glaciers of Mount Everest came tumbling from the sky.
As the snow muffled everything, more quiet than an empty jar.
Gutters no more overflow as spikes grow from their bellies.
The badgers all get confused as the ground grows one foot deeper.
Then suddenly all at once the goblet cloud is dashed from the sky's lips.
The sun then wins the battle.
The cannon is fired.
The armies felled.
And now it's gone forever.

GRATITUDE

Jo
Age 13
Co. Kildare

Gratitude means you are thankful for somebody or something in our world today. The people I am thankful for are: nurses, doctors, carers, train drivers, ambulance drivers and all staff working in retail in this current critical pandemic. All these professionals are working very hard during this Covid-19 pandemic here in Kildare, Ireland and worldwide.

We are very lucky to have so many people treating, caring, curing and looking after our needs when this very evil virus is present. This pandemic is killing hundreds of our people each day in Ireland and also impacting gravely on our neighbouring countries. Though, gratitude to me is more than thanking these professionals, it gives us the youth of Ireland happiness and optimistic hope for our future.

I am grateful for my parents because they both work on the front line. Mam is a nurse, she helps the vulnerable people in Dublin city. She walks all around the city, visiting at-risk people, she tries to help them all. I am most grateful, however, for the train drivers of Ireland and Irish Rail staff. In this small county of ours we have wonderful train drivers who bring the frontline staff to and from their workplaces. My dad is an unsung hero in Ireland today - he is a train driver. He leaves home about three o'clock, in the early hours of the morning, to do safety checks on trains in Heuston Station, Dublin before he drives his locomotor train to Kent Station in Cork.

My dad does this work five days a week in winter, spring, summer and autumn. The drivers travel all around the country, to the rebel city of Cork, to the capital city of Dublin, to the city I personally love best, Galway, to the home city of the *Titanic*, Belfast, and my family's favourite city of Waterford. These men and women work very hard at their jobs. Their work is complicated and a safety critical role. The train drivers stop their heavy locomotor at each station, letting people on and off. They ensure people in wheelchairs and those who need help are able to access and dismount safely and happily. If time permits, the train driver blows the horn for young children as the kids are excited to hear this noise.

The person that I am grateful for in my life is my dad. To express my appreciation, I make him a delicious dinner most days and for dessert I have healthy flapjacks ready for him.

I will also send this letter to his boss, so he can have holidays after this Covid-19 pandemic has disappeared. I am grateful to you, my dad is simply the best.

AN STOIRM INTINNE

Con
Co. Ciarraí

Tagann an stoirm isteach gan choinne
cosúil le saighdiúirí ar chapail thuibhseacha.
Caoineann an ghaoth mar mhactíre i bpian.
Tosnaíonn clocha sneachta ag eitilt trasna na bpáirceanna
ar shéideáin fhíorfhuar gaoithe
agus casann go bán é an sneachta tobann
gach aon rud go bun na spéire.

Baineann an ghaoth an díon meirgeach den bhothán.
Briseann sí craobhacha den chrann.
Tógann na bláthanna a bpeiteal isteach.
Casann na capaill phréachta a ndroim leis an ngaoth
agus na ba i bhfolach i gcúinne na páirce.

Éiríonn an t-uisce thar bhruach na habhann.
Tagann tonnta ollmhóra suas ar an trá,
ag pléascadh sna pluaiséanna
agus ag caitheamh cáitheadh go hard sa spéir.

Istigh sa bhaile
tá gach éinne ina gcodladh go breá sonasach.
Amuigh sa chlós
tá an domhan dian, dainséarach
agus an bháisteach shearbh ag bualadh ar na fallaí.

Ar maidin tagann an síochán.
Tá an fharraige ciúin, suaimhneach.
Tá na scamail imithe agus an spéir go geal gorm.

Go mall, go maránta, tagann na daoine amach.
Leánn an sneachta
agus tógann sé leis
gach uile cuimhne
den aimsir fhuar chrua.

THAT ONE TIME

Eve
Age 13
Co. Down

That one time we were stuck indoors,
No one allowed in or out.
When all you would do is roam the floors,
No matter how late at night.

That one time when time had stopped,
And clocks were no longer required.
It did not matter if you were asleep or not,
Regardless, you were always tired.

That one time when to be anti-social was social,
Video calls upon video calls commenced.
When we talked to far off relatives,
As if it was only over the fence.

That one time when cabin fever thrived,
More common than COVID-19.
With brothers and sisters lucky to survive,
The wrath of the angry teens.

That one time when the larders were emptied,
The Wispas gone in a day.
Frantically shopping, the mothers are frenzied,
While keeping two meters away.

That one time when the roads were empty,
From the N1 to the M2.
Despite this, there are birds aplenty,
Their sweet singing entertaining us when we've nothing to do.

That one time when Netflix was watched,
From Boss Baby to Our Planet in a day.
The company struggling to keep up,
looking for more shows to display.

That one time when cleaning was fun,
Anything to pass half an hour.

The bathrooms were spotless, everything was done,
Not a single mark on the shower.

That one time when daily exercise was an occasion,
Clothes and makeup, well prepared.
Staying within the two-kilometre limitation,
The Sunday best was all you would wear.

That one time when tempers were frayed,
Lego was smashed and ornaments flew.
People were called names and bad words were said,
Then the referee would hear and separate the two.

That one time when you would talk to anyone,
Stopping every car that drove by.
Even those you would once run away from,
Of gossip they now bring your supply.

That one time when ecosystems thrived,
With no factories open to kill them.
Birds are chirping and bees survived,
No rush hour or morning mayhem.

That one time when manners were vital,
Covering your mouth with your elbow.
When even a cough wasn't acceptable,
Did you have coronavirus? No one would know.

That one time when soap was gold,
Hand sanitizer worth millions.
People robbed the shops of what wasn't even sold,
Selling them on for billions.

That one time when human lives were but numbers,
Decimals and percentages galore.
The daily news making it more of a bummer,
The death toll rising more and more.

But now we see the dumps are opening,
Though the queues surpass belief.
Towards normality we are now heading,
No longer running to the peak.

Now we see groups of six friends in a park,
Chatting from two meters away each.
The world will soon be back to the start,
After sliding back down the peak.

Now we see the world leaders uniting,
Determined to find a cure.
The NHS working endlessly with those who are fighting,
The coronavirus war.

Soon we will see family and friends,
Have birthday parties once more.
Brothers and sisters United again,
Back to normality I am sure.

DARK TIMES

Aisling
Co. Sligo

Is going blind getting sick?

I feel fine, it's just dark.

Lights off in the room

could be just the cocoon

Butterfly emerging

flawed more than sick

Weighing up the risks

A currency of symptoms

The hierarchy of ill.

To survive, stay away

Or get seen and see?

We're here, we're open!

Doors open but closed

Blinds drawn.

Stay away! Kind of,

Or if you're really sick

Sit there, not here

Can't you hear what I say?

Can't you lip-read through this mask?

Fogging screens and layers between us,

Reminders of red onions for lunch.

I'll examine your eyes

Try see what you can't

Sit tight in the dark

Back to your cocoon

I hope you'll see me soon.

I WILL MIND YOU

Adeline
Co. Louth

White walls. White lights. Bright lights. Blue scrubs. Blue gowns. White masks. Goggles. No windows. Alarms.

His face so pale, so small, spelt fear.

When I reach his hand, I hold in mine, and tell him "I will mind you."

The sound of voices, muffled, surround and air notions of rest, antibiotics, lungs and ventilator support.

I still see his fear. I grip his hand, mine in a glove, and say "I will mind you."

And as his eyes roll and close, his grip weakens and is lost, I say "I will mind you."

There's hustle and bustle, sorting and organising, and then a sense of calm. The alarms have lessened and I say "I will mind you."

I think – my boys – at home. Panic. Have I been exposed? Has my PPE breached?

Fear. I look around. My colleagues. My team. No time for fear.

What follows now is clinical focus – ventilator settings, inotropes, arterial and central lines, bloods, measurements, stabilisation. Calm.

The phone rings, his family to enquire. Their fear.

And I say, "I will mind him."

ISOLATING

Caroline
Co. Dublin

Confined to four walls,
Left alone with one's thoughts,
Previous life now a distant memory,
Left to wonder about the world that awaits

Stare blankly out the window
Minutes, hours, days later
Dark feelings surface, loneliness ensues
No contact made, isolating

Long for a walk, a talk,
Oh! Only to sit in a café.
Social distancing may be new to many,
For few, no different to yesterday.

Fourteen days now long passed
However, life struggles continue,
Hide behind the familiar smile
While my battles linger.

I THINK WE NEED TO TALK...

Damian
Co. Dublin

Why is it that so many of us balk
At the idea of having to talk
About issues that we find troubling
Even when we know we are not coping?
Why to us does it seem to make more sense
To say nothing, to suffer in silence?
To shut out all of those who might just care?
To refuse the many supports out there?
Why is it we find it so hard to speak?
Do we feel reaching out makes us seem weak?
Do we think that we must always be strong?
Maybe that is where we are going wrong!
Oh what a pity, what an awful shame
That our feelings we are afraid to name,
That we cannot discuss our darkest fears,
That we are so afraid of our own tears.
One can only hope the penny will drop,
That this way of thinking one day will stop,
For it shows great strength, great courage indeed,
To reach out for help in your hour of need.

PERHAPS...

Damian
Co. Dublin

Should you feel like just giving up,
Or feel that you have had enough,
Remember you are not alone,
We all have troubles of our own.
Though you may think life is not fair
Who goes through life without a care?
We all have our own cross to bear;
Those without are extremely rare.
It is vital we keep going
For we have no way of knowing
What for us tomorrow might bring
If we do our best, keep trying.
Perhaps you may look back one day
And proudly be able to say,
Though life was hard, extremely tough,
I'm so glad I did not give up.

How strong we can be

Only in adversity

Can we truly see

ADVERSITY

Damian
Co. Dublin

When lost in the depths of despair,
When all hope appears to be gone,
One has to dig even deeper
To find the strength to carry on.
Though one may doubt the strength is there,
It lies within us all somewhere.

DESPAIR
Damian
Co. Dublin

Trees cannot always be in bloom
Nor are plants always in flower.
Why then people, do we presume,
Should be at their best every hour?
With their best side always on show,
No matter what, through all seasons;
Worry when they are not just so
And start searching for the reasons?
We need to realise one day
What is just natural I guess...
It's ok not to be ok,
Not to be always at one's best.

IT'S OK
Damian
Co. Dublin

A SONNET

Damian
Co. Dublin

Nothing we do can ever change the past
It is now history, over and gone.
Until we can accept that fact at last,
Can we ever hope to really move on?
And who can know what tomorrow will bring,
Or if tomorrow we will even see?
Why waste precious time waiting and hoping
For something that may never come to be?
So forget tomorrow and yesterday,
Live in neither the past or the future.
Resolve to make the most of each new day,
Every moment promise to treasure.
Each new day is a gift we are granted
Which not one of us should take for granted.

Who a deaf ear, a blind eye turn,
The chance to speak against wrong spurn,
By their inaction, their silence,
Guilty are in every sense

A WORD
Damian
Co. Dublin

To myself I make a promise,
A vow to be all I can be;
To live up to my full promise,
To the true potential in me.

A PROMISE

Damian
Co. Dublin

Much harder than your own pain to bear
Is the pain of one for whom you care.
Their pain for yourself you would welcome
If it would ease their suffering some.

PAIN
Damian
Co. Dublin

DO...
Damian
Co. Dublin

Do cover your cough or your sneeze,
Dispose of hankies safely please.
Wash your hands immediately,
With soap and water thoroughly
For twenty seconds if not more,
And more frequently than before.
Disinfect 'oft used surfaces,
Refrain from touching your faces,
Leave space between you and others;
At least six feet or two metres.
Stay at home where safe you shall be
To best protect your family.
The government's guidance obey
And "flatten the curve" we just may.
On each of us there's an onus
To stop the spread of this virus;
We're in this together truly,
Do your part! Act responsibly!

PANDEMIC BEAUTY!

Dearbhla

The greys they are a-showing,
The mop it is a-growing,



Shellac - I can't remember.
My last was in December!



False lashes- no need for these



While I'm watching CBeebies!

Spray tan done once a week,



It made me feel so chic!!



Pandemic times, horrific times
My looks have gone to rot



I've had to invest in a home self-waxing pot!

It can't be hard, just heat it up and lay the wax on thick,
Then take a strip, hold it down and pull off nice 'n' quick! ✓

Well, oh my days! Sweet Lord above...

I think I'm about to faint.

It's hot it's sore, I'm bald I'm bruised,

I'm doin' this no more!

I tried to tint my eyebrows a darker shade of brown,
but holy cow, they're orange now.

I just look like a clown! 🤡

I can't go out to Tesco or ASDA or Lidl too.

I'll have to self-isolate and keep social distance too!

I long for happy times, when I'm wearing skinny jeans,
my nails on point, my pals in arms and swigging back the jars!

THE TWO!
Dearbhla

Caoimhe had a brother.
The two were thick as thieves,
But when they'd start to argue,
It would bring you to your knees!

Now Caoimhe loved her chocolate,
She was as sneaky as could be.
She'd climb and crawl up any wall,
She'd try to outsmart me.

And if she needed some assistance
She'd call upon himself!
The two would work together
To reach the upper shelf!

One keeping an ear out
For footsteps on the stairs,
The other hurriedly gathering
Everything but pears!

The footsteps would grow nearer,
The panic setting in,
But the victory of knowing
They'd raided the entire biscuit tin!

Have you been sneaking treats?
You pair, please tell me now.
I can see it on your faces, your fingers and your toes.
Tell the truth I always say. Don't lie right through your nose!

But Mum it wasn't us.
I saw with mine own eyes,
That sneaky ginger Tom
Snuck in with prying eyes!

We were both getting some fruit,
When alas! he scared us so.

Poor Daire nearly choked
On his sneaky toffee Yo-Yo!

LOOK
Doreen
Co. Kerry

Look at the rain, see the rainbow

Look at the dark sky, see twinkling stars

Look at someone struggling, see ways to help

Look at someone celebrating, see their joy

Look at the news, see positive stories

Look at the sunrise, see the joy of a new day

Look at the sunset, see a time to unwind

Look into the eyes of an elder, see their wisdom

Look at the smile of a child, see their potential

Look at the mountain, see challenge

Look at the obstacle, see adventure

Look at the problem, see your mind expand

Look at the past, see what you can learn

Look after each other

Look after yourself

Look back with peace

Look now with resilience

Look now with strength

Look now with bravery

Look forward with hope

Look, it will be all right.

Keep looking

THE REDEPLOYED

Elaine
Co. Kildare

The automatic doors open, deceptive, inviting.
What lies therein is overwhelming, frightening.
Ill-prepared, I am glued to the floor,
As I process the scene, akin to a war
Not a military zone of conflict and strife,
But a united battle to help support life.
The emotions within me instantly seethe;
In that moment I forget to breathe.
My heart is racing, my head's in a tizz,
And the family enjoy another virtual quiz.

I am donned in PPE, now redeployed,
In an endeavour to fill the nursing void.
Staff guised in hazmat relentlessly task;
I cannot tell the face behind the mask.
I listen and learn on a vertical curve
These alien things I must observe.
Breathing machines, drips and drains,
multiple infusions pumping into veins.
Information overload abounds my head;
I forget there is a person in the bed.
This realisation, this disconnection,
fills my senses with utter dejection.
Suppressing my tears, I can feel my heart beat
And the neighbours play Bingo out on the street.

This virus, indiscriminate in its choosing,
Invades until it seems we are losing.
Oxygen levels plummet and temperatures soar,
Alarms in the background constantly roar.
Every cell and organ is under attack,
As modern medicine attempts to fight back,
Monitoring, titrating, adjusting the plan.
Working round the clock; it is virus v. man.
Each hour I check, count and record.
And the social isolators are seemingly bored.

Regardless of circumstance; "No Family"'s the rule;

This aspect of caring seems particularly cruel.
I am handed an iPad for a Facetime call,
I see a wife and two children crumble into a ball.
Virtual comfort, something to clutch,
I choke for this family, denied human touch.
An imposter, a surrogate, I provide the support
While the family and friends are left thwart.
The hazmat suit becomes unbearably warm.
I cannot reconcile this apparent new norm.
My goggles fill up, my lungs constrict
And at home they are having a Netflix binge.

My brain will not quiet, even through night;
It is struggling to process this ICU plight.
Still all on my desktop, a weight on my shoulders,
Refusing to go to the Cloud or the folders.
Despite the stress and anxiety, tension, and tears,
The redeployed work on through our fears.
A variety of backgrounds, all out of our field,
Contributing to the frontline serves as our yield.
We toil closely together with hope and heart
And the good people of Ireland stay together apart.

I AM TIRED
Linda Keogh
Co. Meath

My mind has raced since all of this started
I am trying so hard not to get downhearted.
Watching and waiting in the mayhem and worry,
Every day has been such a hurry.

'Stay safe' is a statement I no longer wish to hear.
I, like you, want to hold my family near.

Each day feels like a week or a month.
I am tired, so tired,
I don't wish to be blunt,
We continue to fight the fight on the front.

Pandemonium in a pandemic is not academic,
With rules made in haste and we don't want to fudge,
But people are people,
Who am I to judge?

'Stay home' is the plea that we continue to cry,
The anger I feel when people don't, I try to suppress

My husband, weary with my frustration,
As I try so hard to be proud of our nation.

1984 I trained as a nurse;
I never thought we would be faced with this curse.

Family and friends I hold them all dear,
Just like you all, I have my own fears.
I listen each day to pain and the vex,
Trying to fix whatever is next.

I am tired so tired and wish this would end,
But it's far from over, my lovely friends.

But the fight will go on
And the phoenix will rise,

And all my colleagues will have tears in their eyes,

Reflecting on all that has been.

And they, my friends, are kings and queens.

I AM A NURSE

Mags
Co. Kildare

I am a nurse.

It's in my every fibre, my DNA, my make-up.

I, like many others, floated in other directions,

Like a dandelion seed caught on the wind.

We blow in different directions.

We catch in different soil; some closer to the stalk, others further.

No matter where the wind takes the seed, it is still a dandelion.

I am a nurse.

I needed to help, to do something.

It was there in the pit of my stomach;

The seed growing, reaching out towards my tribe.

When the wind came, I stood in the storm;

The relentless pulling in all directions, whipping back and forth.

But I am a nurse, my roots are strong.

I stand with my tribe,

Blowing in the wind,

Weathering the storm.



A MESSAGE FROM CLARECARE OVER 65'S

Michael
Co. Clare

So you're stuck in quarantine and I know you're fed up,
Sometimes there's not much to do except refilling your cup.
There's nothing on TV and the walls stay the same,
The deck of cards is getting dusty, craving a game.
You miss all your friends; it's boring being alone.
It's just not the same when we can only speak on the phone.
But amongst all the chaos, know that you're playing an essential role,
Just by staying home out of danger, you're helping to keep this virus under control.
I know it's frustrating, especially in this good weather,
But if we are to beat this, we need to all work together.
While some of us have work, the majority must stay inside,
It's the only way to quell the growth before turning the tide.
So we sacrifice the now until Covid-19 is no more,
Before we return to normality and do all the things we could do before.

The centre will still be here when all this is done,
Along with the music and dancing and all of that fun.
There will be bingo and games, exercise and art,
Forget social distancing, we won't have to stay apart.
The food will once again be served with a joke and a smile,
And we will all be gushing and wooing over the ladies' latest hairstyle.
On birthdays, we'll all cheer and eat cake; it will be so nice!
And some extra special clients might even be celebrating it twice.
So when you're back, get ready for all the excitement and fuss,
Until you can't take anymore and run towards the bus!

So once again, I know it's hard, but I have faith that it will all be okay,
As long as we all adhere to the rules, we will all be reunited soon, someday.
Keep positive friends, for we are over the worst.
We wish we could cancel quarantine right now, but safety comes first.
So sit tight a little more, it won't be much longer,
And if there's one good thing out of this;
It's that the community spirit will be far stronger.

Covid-19 has taught us a lesson,
And that's to appreciate our family and friends,
And it's one we will all implement when this all ends.

We at Clarecare Over 65's are counting down the days until we reopen our doors
And have you all back to relive happy memories and create some more.
We can't wait to see you all for some chats and a laugh,
But for now, we miss you and take care, from all of the staff.

LITTLE THINGS MEAN A LOT

Michael
Co. Clare

The year is twenty twenty,
A nice spring day in March around half two.
The birds are flying overhead,
The sky is oh so blue.

The children are playing in the garden,
Like they always should.
People remain in their homes,
All for the greater good.

There is an eerie sense about,
That no one can explain.
No matter where the heart wants to go,
The mind has to refrain.

A virus is sweeping through the Earth,
It took everyone by storm.
The world as we knew it, has changed so fast,
This is so far from the norm.

Some have to leave their homes,
To work and serve us all.
They fill the shelves with groceries,
A job no longer deemed as small.

In a hospital not too far from me,
Healthcare workers saving lives,
Patients being so well cared for;
Children, grandparents, husbands, wives.

Tomorrow I will go to work
To play my part, however small,
My family will remain at home
I'll truly miss them all.

But I'll return home with open arms,
And greet them with a smile.
The world too will heal from all of this,
It'll just take a little while.

We all need to stay apart
And follow social distancing rules.
This includes closure of so many businesses,
Even pubs, banks, shops and schools.

These times are very strange,
This is all so different and new.
But take a breath, enjoy the rest,
It's the best that we can do.

Everyone has their part to play,
We're all in this together,
Just follow the rules and stay safe,
We'll soon make our world better.

THE TIME THE WORLD SLOWED DOWN

Trisha
Co. Carlow

The year is twenty twenty,
A nice spring day in March around half two.
The birds are flying overhead,
The sky is oh so blue.

The children are playing in the garden,
Like they always should.
People remain in their homes,
All for the greater good.

There is an eerie sense about,
That no one can explain.
No matter where the heart wants to go,
The mind has to refrain.

A virus is sweeping through the Earth,
It took everyone by storm.
The world as we knew it, has changed so fast,
This is so far from the norm.

Some have to leave their homes,
To work and serve us all.
They fill the shelves with groceries,
A job no longer deemed as small.

In a hospital not too far from me,
Healthcare workers saving lives,
Patients being so well cared for;
Children, grandparents, husbands, wives.

Tomorrow I will go to work
To play my part, however small,
My family will remain at home
I'll truly miss them all.

But I'll return home with open arms,
And greet them with a smile.
The world too will heal from all of this,
It'll just take a little while.

We all need to stay apart
And follow social distancing rules.
This includes closure of so many businesses,
Even pubs, banks, shops and schools.

These times are very strange,
This is all so different and new.
But take a breath, enjoy the rest,
It's the best that we can do.

Everyone has their part to play,
We're all in this together,
Just follow the rules and stay safe,
We'll soon make our world better.

PHARMACIST INPUT TO PATIENT HEALTH PROMOTION – A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR PATIENT AND TAXPAYER

Aidan
Co. Offaly

That the health services in this country are in crisis is hardly news to anyone. But what may not be so well known is that major issues existed before Covid-19 hit and this is despite the fact that our health spending is one of the highest per capita expenditures in the OECD.

Life expectancy rises inexorably (at the highest rate in the EU), as do obesity levels, and the treatment of chronic diseases accounts for approximately 75% of all health activity and costs. Winter hospital bed crises are as inevitable as rain in summer and, despite lip service to investment in primary care, little is achieved and joined-up thinking in reducing demand for expensive hospital treatment is notable by its absence. That prevention, early diagnosis and treatment would diminish these costs does not seem to mandate reform.

To add insult to ill-health, we now have the difficulty in creating and providing an effective vaccine or other method of creating and maintaining immunity to the current coronavirus infection. That the uptake of the flu vaccine is low, particularly in the most at-risk groups, illustrates the need for change.

From a Sickness Service to a Health Service: Towards a Patient-Centred Model

A relatively recent government report (*Future Health: a strategic framework for reform of the health services, 2012-2015*) has suggested a move “away from a hospital-centric model of care towards a new model that treats patients at the lowest level of complexity that is safe, timely, efficient, and as close to home as possible.”

It is acknowledged that most common chronic conditions are avoidable and that care should be preventative, planned and well-coordinated. Prevention policies and programmes can be cost-effective, can reduce health-care costs, and can improve the health of the population, with consequent economic benefits.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy (2013) report acknowledges that chronic disease is one of the most significant health challenges and the major component of service activity and expenditure. It suggests that priority be accorded to the promotion of health and wellbeing and seeks to:

-“support people to maintain, improve or manage their physical and mental health and well-being”, and

-“support the development and implementation of policies to reduce...factors associated with disability, chronic disease and premature mortality.”

In passing, it points to the high prevalence of undiagnosed hypertension.

Healthy Ireland: a framework for improved health and wellbeing, 2013-2025, points out that health is the second largest component of public expenditure (after the Department of Social Protection) and that chronic diseases are the major drivers of healthcare costs.

It cites national and international evidence that the associated morbidity has significant economic costs. Indeed, it suggests that we face the prospect of unaffordable future health costs and recommends “putting in place targeted, cross-sectoral and cost-effective prevention programmes.”

Implementation

There is a shortage of GPs, particularly in rural and/or deprived areas, where ill-health among patients is already most prevalent. The fact that so many of these medics are at, or close to, retirement age is exacerbating this problem.

SlainteCare’s reforms and extensions to free healthcare will increase demand on the sector, increasing its difficulty in contributing more to disease prevention, earlier diagnosis and treatment adherence. The question immediately arises: how to meet the demand for accessible, convenient, affordable, high quality and evidence-based promotion of health and wellbeing?

It is a truism that pharmacists are the most accessible of healthcare practitioners, with the most frequent interaction with patients. They enjoy the overwhelming trust of the public, invariably attaining exceptional satisfaction ratings for honesty, ethics and quality of service delivery. The latest surveys available indicate that over 90% of those questioned want them to provide more healthcare services, recognising that the sector already provides lower cost, but effective, advice and disease screening.

It has been accepted in many quarters that pharmacists present the most underutilised resource in healthcare.

Pharmacists have the education, training, availability and willingness to contribute considerably to the health and well-being of their patients and communities. They enjoy the trust of the public and it only requires political determination to use these resource to fulfil their duty to both patients and taxpayers.

CHANGING COMMUNICATIONS

Anne

Co. Fermanagh, working in Co. Cavan

I have worked as a speech and language therapist for over ten years now, supporting children with the basic right to communicate. It is often assumed that a speech and language therapist spends a portion of their time directly working with the human mouth. For me, this is not the case and I can probably count on one hand the number of times I have carried out oro-motor activities on a child.

So when Covid-19 crept into our country and redeployments started to take place within our team, to be placed in a Covid test centre and tasked with swabbing members of the community came as something of a career change. There is something very invasive about asking a person to lower their car window fully, stick out their tongue and open wide while you pop a stick down to the back of their throat, most likely making them gag and cough apologetically. And to then take that same stick, coated with their glistening mucus - to again slide it so far into their nose as to make their eyes water and give them the sensation that you have just rubbed it off their very brain!

All walks of community life were tested in this way. I swabbed tiny babies as they slept unsuspectingly in their cosy car seats and if awake, asking mums or dads or their older brother in the back seat to hold their hands down for the procedure. I swabbed ladies and gentlemen right into their 90s whose lives had already experienced many different events - both good and bad - and now this.

I tested wiggly toddlers and children and their equally wiggly parents. Mums and dads staying stony faced so as not to scare their kids in the back. Whole carloads of families who watched anxiously while each one had their turn until it was time for them. Children and adults with disabilities and with difficulty understanding why this was happening and why it had to be so nasty and who were these alien-like people invading their personal space anyway? People who were already sick or had a loved one that was sick; their fear and worry etched on their faces.

Many people were carrying so many fears and so many worries. Our job as testers was to swab all of these people, package up their sample and send it off for testing.

We couldn't tell any of these people if they had or didn't have the virus and that added to their worries and fears. We couldn't tell them that if they did test positive, that they would be okay and they wouldn't become seriously sick. We couldn't tell them if the virus would spread to the small baby they were caring for, or if because they had cancer, if it was going to make them sicker. We couldn't tell them how exactly they were going to isolate from their young and needy family or from their sick husband or wife or parent.

We did chat with them though, offer them whatever reassurances we could and acknowledged the difficult time they were going through. I have no doubt that each of us carried a little piece of the worry we were told about from each person that drove through. And while we were able to talk and reassure these people, all they ever saw of us was our eyes.

As a speech and language therapist, I know that communication is not just about talking, it's about facial expressions, body language, being able to touch someone, holding their hand during a difficult time. We of course hadn't any of these amazing weapons of humanity; it was all in the eyes.

The coronavirus turned life as everyone knew it upside down. The week I started at the test centre, I too was carrying my own fears and worries. My aunt had just undergone surgery for bowel cancer and had spent a week alone in hospital. My uncle, her husband, found it all extremely difficult to cope with and was admitted to a psychiatric unit. We feared for them with these significant health difficulties alone, never mind the risk of either of them contracting the virus in hospital.

I had visited my GP the week before starting at the test centre as I had been worried for some time about pain in my breast. The day after my second shift in the test centre, I went for a mammogram. This was a difficult week to begin to get used to my new role, wearing headache-inducing PPE and beginning to carry out invasive tests on anxious people. My own support network was changed. Coronavirus made it harder to communicate with family and friends, so I didn't tell my family about the scan. Everyone had enough of their own worries.

In training that week, I hung onto the eyes of my trainer, sought out the reassurance that I was doing all right, looked there for the humanity that was missing elsewhere, covered up by masks and gowns and prevented by lockdown. I think of the countless people who drove through our centre and clung onto our eyes in a time of crisis. I think of the countless more in hospitals all over the country and all over the world who have desperately sought out the comfort of caring eyes. I think of all the medical staff that offered all of that care in such difficult circumstances; no doubt whilst carrying their own

fears and worries.

It makes me think about how much we really can communicate and soothe with just our eyes, in the absence of everything else, and how the eyes really can be “the windows to the soul.”



NOT LIFE AS I KNEW IT

Colette
Co. Waterford

When the news of the arrival of coronavirus to Ireland broke in February 2020, my heart fell into the pit of my stomach. As a neonatal intensive care nurse, I knew all too well that the spread of this deadly virus was going to be hard and fast. I wasn't wrong - it was soon being diagnosed in every county in Ireland. When the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar spoke to the nation on St. Patrick's Day, the palpable nervous anxiety surrounding his message was to be felt in every household across the country. Ireland was heading for lockdown, of that there was to be no doubt.

There was blatant disregard for social distancing in those early days, unfortunately and undoubtedly sending us into the long tunnel of watching and waiting that lockdown brought. The severity of this virus was not fully understood by many; that is, until it began hammering down their front door.

My work and home life changed completely. Every morning I woke up feeling like I needed to tread carefully through my day. My workday began with the 25-mile journey to the hospital where I worked. I encountered three Garda checkpoints on the way to and from work every day, with polite, worn-out Gardaí asking to see my letter of permission to travel, while standing back at a distance, lest I pass on some of the dastardly, infamous virus through the cracked down window.

I then entered the hospital, cautiously walking behind fellow frontline staff, nodding and smiling, but never conversing and never stopping to be sociable. We would walk with our heads down, and our eyes nervously flitting over and back to check our distancing. We would show our identification badges to the many security people we met at the door, then apply alcohol gel to our hands and make our way to our respective wards and offices. The corridors were eerily quiet. The yellow signs and stickers everywhere changed the landscape I was so used to, after working in the hospital for the past 23 years. This was new and dangerous territory - we all knew it.

The potential for disaster was always looming. The air and atmosphere was laden thickly with its ugly presence. The buttons we pressed every day for the lift and the door handles we opened on our way to our wards, were now potential hotspots for accidentally picking up this horrifically violent virus, and bringing it into the vulnerable, dependent patients in our care.

As neonatal intensive care nurses, my colleagues and I had always had an exceptional understanding of infection control precautions and procedures. Our patient population demand high levels of protective isolation after their immature and hasty arrivals into the world. The new challenge was now going to be the added burden of not bringing the virus in to them, and if it did somehow sneak in, we couldn't let it get back out to others and the rest of the hospital.

This virus was a lethal, not fully understood, potentially catastrophic piece of nature that none of us wanted to get to know better. It could be carried on shoes and clothes, so we changed into and out of uniforms and shoes at the beginning and end of every shift. It could be carried on your hands and from contact with surfaces, so we handwashed and hand gelled at every available opportunity, in between donning and doffing gloves and protective aprons and gowns. It could be carried through the air, so we wore masks when dealing with every infant and parent, and when we could not maintain a two-metre social distance from each other, during procedures and resuscitations.

The day would pass in a lather of sweaty, nervous, anxious hours. Nursing in 27-degree heat was something we were accustomed to, but not in aprons, masks and gloves on a continuous basis.

The shift would end and we would face the next challenge of trying not to bring anything that might be in the hospital back out to our families. Off would come the uniforms and into plastic bags

carried with gloved hands to the boot of the car. I would drive out the road and encounter my three check points without fail. I would pull up outside the house and my three children and husband knew not to come out to greet me, as they would always have done. Instead, they would open the door for me, and I would leave my shoes in the porch and walk in with my uniform and put it directly into the washing machine along with whatever clothes I had worn to work that day. I would then walk to the bathroom, shower, and finally feel like it was okay to go to my family for much needed hugs and words of comfort and to seek the solace I craved in the camaraderie of their wonderful love and friendship.

My days off work were few but treasured. My family and I luckily live in an isolated countryside setting, and so social distance worries and woes were not something we had to contend with here. My children are old enough to have been able to home school without much input from their dad and me. They did their lessons and their homework, and actually revelled in the new-found freedom they suddenly found themselves with! They read books and watched movies. They Zoomed and X-boxed with their friends online. They experimented with new recipes and baking methods, sometimes to my dismay, because of my nice, clean kitchen.

The only complaint I had about lockdown at home was that my grocery bill climbed higher every week. Money well spent, I suppose. Sure, what else was I going to spend it on! We listened to music a lot more too, as to my dismay my 12- and 14-year-old boys had no idea who Bruce Springsteen was, and my 18-year-old daughter didn't know who Dire Straits were. I soon remedied that.

THE UNSIGHTED MAN

David
Co. Tipperary

The sun beat remorselessly on the caravan. The windows themselves were open wide to draw air in, though no breeze existed to cool the morning's heat. The sun had been up for a couple of hours now and was the only thing that marked a different day. The weather in any other year would have been regarded as superb by all except the farmers and gardeners and had not changed now for four weeks. Glorious sunshine going to waste. Nowhere to go, no beach to lie on or forest to walk in.

The world only existed now on television or teleconferences. Distant voices that conjured up faces of colleagues, family and friends. Or Zoom and Team conferences that reinforced how distant we had all become and how badly our memories remembered those faces. But then television makes you look different anyway, or so I told myself.

Inside the caravan, my new office, my workspace, the heat came from two computers, a printer, kettle and my two dogs - a St Bernard and a Bassett Hound who had both taken to coming to work with me since I started cocooning. I was later told that cocooning was when you weren't working and that technically I was just working from home. But I was 59, diabetic and in the HSE, working in offices where two metres was wall to wall and open offices had desks six feet apart.

Covid-19 - that unseen enemy that people already are forgetting, was an unknown. For a while it was easier to remain at work to organise things; setting up test centres, organising PPE. We made it up as we went along.

PPE became the gold currency of the HSE, with nursing homes screaming we had left them behind. In truth PPE was stolen if left unguarded. Any surplus was centralised and given out to those with Covid cases. There was a time in February when all the surplus PPE was in one box in the boot of my car and probably did more mileage than any travelling from China, until eventually it dwindled to nothing. I gave the last mask and gown to a cleaner in a hospital. A week later one of his colleagues died. I cried that night and cry now remembering.

Demand changed as we chased to keep up. Test centres were "stood up" and "ramped up". Direction changes came unannounced through media briefings like a stream of nonsensical edicts from on high. A game of one-upmanship. *We'll test 10,000, we'll test 100,000* became the newspapers' stick to beat us with.

"How many did you test today?" became the mantra. "Why did you close this test centre today?" the accusation. "How many healthcare workers did you not test?" the unspoken accusation. "How many didn't we save?" my conscience.

There came a point where I knew I could push my luck no longer and decided to work from home. At first seemingly idyllic, but then working hours began to stretch from nine hours per day to eighteen hours over the days and weeks. Weekends disappeared. Seven-day weeks for how many weeks had become a blur. Meals came and went, time became meaningless; until here we are today.

Sat in my caravan with my two dogs, the heat merciless and tears running endlessly down my face. I can no longer see to read the computer and I am beaten. I have lost and feel bereft.

Why? Because today I can only see blurred shapes. Last night, as I tried to finish inputting lists onto the computer, my eyes began to fail me and all the symbols on the computer conspired to blur together until I could no longer work. Thinking I was only tired, I took off my reading glasses and rubbed my eyes, vowing to finish the job in the morning.

So this morning I rose with the sun and by 5am was breakfasted and dressed in my suit, ready for work and waiting for the world to be less blurry. But it didn't happen. Oh the sun rose with no problem, but every minute that passed only brought a warmer day, not a clearer one. So by six o'clock I was sat in the caravan with full magnification on the computer and still no clarity.

It doesn't matter how I try; it's not the computer, it's my eyes. And the world gets smaller somehow and darker.

I know I'm in trouble. I check my blood sugar level for the first time in days. It's normally between 12-14; high but manageable. I can't understand how I haven't checked it, but the date on the machine of my last test is three days ago. Today my machine tells me it is beyond the machine's parameters.

I should increase my dosage of insulin, but I can't see the numbers on the pen and have to count them, click by click, to my normal dose and then add two clicks. I know I've missed a few doses over

the last few days, but I'm unsure how many doses or how many days. "Sleep eat work repeat."

The needle enters my skin effortlessly, but in my haste, I dispense the liquid into my body too quickly and a small lump forms under the skin. I tell myself, *keep calm and walk round the garden for half an hour and then retest*. Sure enough, when I test again, I can make out three numbers - 36.8 and small unreadable words which I know are patronising me. I already know it is an extreme high reading.

Right now, I am frightened. For now I have three enemies: Covid, diabetes and myself. I am no hero, just a foolish man sinking into darkness and I am alone with my two dogs who wonder why I cry.

I cry for the man I gave the last mask to who lost a colleague and how I have failed him through my stupidity and now can no longer fight for him.

I am defeated.

THE PHOENIX WILL RISE

Linda
Co. Louth

Every era presents unique challenges to healthcare and this century is no different. There is unprecedented attention on quality in healthcare, with many practises scrutinised heavily by the public; keyboard warriors hiding behind anonymity with a wide range of virtual followers that offer solutions without the expertise.

During Covid-19 I found I had a lot more time to myself which provided more reflection. This was welcomed, but not having the options to discuss things with others has been difficult. I hope that everyone does not forget the real threat that Covid-19 posed, and that many of our colleagues in other countries lost their lives while on duty.

My heart goes out to the parents of children facing severe medical challenges. For you to love and care for your children is a testament to your strength and resolve to be there for them no matter what. Parents of chronically ill children can be modest, but they deserve an awful lot of respect for everything they do.

In my life there are many experiences that could qualify as life-changing. Every new experience was good or bad, but this period has been one of the most transformative that I have encountered.

Whatever I put on paper will never truly reflect my feelings. I have lived with Type One diabetes for the past twenty-one years. Not me personally, but my eldest son was diagnosed when he was nine, a devastating and life-changing event for the family. At the same time, I have seen the hurt and disappointment that has invaded his life in many ways. What a mother experiences when she's told her child will have to endure a lifelong debilitating disease, I cannot put into words.

In many respects, I wished at the time that I could not envision the impact this was going to have on my son's life. But I could, as I have been a nurse for 33 years. I was well aware of the difficult road ahead of him.

To be or to parent a chronically ill child is a difficult experience. Parents can initiate 'normalising' tactics that alleviate the child's feeling of being different and enable a sense of control, with the aim of improving quality of life for the child and family. I can identify with a number of these principles which underlined the normalising tactics.

I have lived every step of this disease, and as a nurse it has been truly unimaginable. As a mother, soul destroying; to watch as he dealt with injections, hypoglycaemia, DKA and struggled with many failures in the healthcare system. Now was an opportunity that I could take to fix these problems.

Most of us huff and puff about waiting half an hour in our doctor's waiting room, but consider the total sum of hours parents of chronically ill children spend waiting in doctors' offices, specialty clinics and hospitals. I have fought to get assistance with medical cards, insurance for cars, and as we tumbled through teenage years, grappling with the fact that he would never be able to live his life like others, although he certainly gave it his best shot.

When Covid-19 was first declared, I was pleasantly surprised by his willingness to cocoon. Knowing that I, as Assistant Director of Nursing for Medicine, had a mammoth task ahead; as his mother, I did not have to worry about his exposure.

Towards the end of lockdown, on Bank Holiday Monday June 1st, I received a phone call from my

son. He needed assistance; he could not see. He would not attend the Emergency Department alone, fearing exposure to the virus, which indeed would threaten his life. The fact that he could not see made it more terrifying.

An urgent referral was made to attend an appointment at the eye hospital for proliferative diabetic retinopathy. Currently he is contacting the National Council for the Blind and coming to terms with the permanency of his blindness and the life changes he and his young family will have to make as a result.

My heart is breaking.

Diabetic retinopathy is a common complication of diabetes which affects the small blood vessels in the lining at the back of the eye. This lining is called the retina.

The retina helps to change what you see into messages that travel along the sight nerve to the brain. A healthy retina is necessary for good eyesight. Proliferative diabetic retinopathy occurs when fragile new blood vessels form on the surface of the retina over time. In the early stages, diabetic retinopathy will not affect the sight, but if the changes get worse, eventually the sight will be affected.

Both proliferative diabetic retinopathy and diabetic macular oedema can be treated and managed if they are detected early enough. If they are left untreated, sight problems will develop.

Covid-19 has meant that many disease processes have been left untreated, causing a seismic tear in our communities and hospital settings by upheaving peace and normalcy.

Overall, my work has been challenging to say the least; using iterative fieldwork as nothing ever goes according to plan. I lost days managing my expectations and, in some cases, was completely thrown off guard. It took days to re-strategise

This will not deter me from making adjustments to the development of diabetic services in this hospital in my current role. It is my belief that organisational development will improve the outcomes for all patients with Type One and Type Two diabetes.

Life is not fair, but as you get older, I believe you come to realise that it's even less fair than you'd originally thought.

The future is uncertain and I ask myself if things will ever go back to normal. I hope we get the opportunities to do the things we had planned to do. I have learned what resilience is and how to focus when situations were precarious and extremely stressful; learning when to change approaches on the frontline, especially when a particular research method has not been proven.

This is not to extend pity or excess sympathy, because that's certainly not what is needed. One lesson is that the chronically ill have no need for sympathy or to be patronised, as if their lives are nothing but suffering. You can show respect and empathy by offering to take them to an appointment or two, or by offering a functional health system suitable to their needs.

THE MAKESHIFT DESK

Linda
Co. Dublin

I sit at my makeshift desk, hidden in my bedroom. Trinkets and photos pushed to one side. Pen and pad at the ready, three different manuals and my work laptop. A therapist by trade, more used to measuring seat widths and leg lengths, enablement and function. Quality of life and the chance to make a difference.

But there is none of that these days. We are in the middle of a war, my trench line not at the front, but at the back, the very back of the frontline. I hope I'm making a difference. I've been redeployed to contact tracing. Redeployed to my makeshift desk.

My first call, and the worker informs me I'm the third person to call her this morning. She knows she is Covid positive. She just wants to go to bed and pull the covers over her head. I go through my script, ask about symptoms, what date last worked, what ward was she assigned to, who she worked with.

Stopped mid-way in my spiel, she angrily informs me she has worked nonstop all week. She has a headache; she needs to sleep but her phone keeps ringing. I ask gently who she nursed for the last three days. She tells me *everyone*. There was no staff available.

And was she wearing PPE, I enquire tentatively?

"Not at the beginning, there was none. They expected us to go in and treat people with no masks. Why did I get it? Why me?"

My words murmuring the set phrases I've been so quickly trained on – they are in front of me - I try to repeat them back. I hope I strike the right note of understanding and sympathy. I probe on the dates – if it was further than two days ago, I don't need to know, but she tells me anyway.

She has her story to tell. I listen, I write, I probe again. Where did you have your lunch? And she tells me, in her car, and of course she had no mask on. How was she supposed to eat with a mask on? I go back to my manual; I need my dates, I need my names, I need to figure out close or casual contacts. She can't remember, someone else might have the information.

She questions me again. What was she to do now? Who was going to do her shopping? I don't have an answer. I keep my tone non-accusatory, lighten my words, check my script. Give her the phone numbers for assistance, direct her to the website.

I close my eyes as I repeat to her the derogation process. It ignites another burst in her.

"I won't be in for 14 days. I don't care what you are saying, I won't be back in work until I'm ready."

I refer back to the dates and names and I get my database information. I wish her well and hang up. She sounded sick on the phone, her voice hoarse and her nose stuffed. I hope she will be okay.

I check the list and make the next call. This worker begins by thanking me and she tries to remember who she was working with and what she was wearing. She's talking so fast I can't understand.

"Will I get into trouble?" she asks. "Because I forgot to change my mask running to the next room. It was urgent". She's anxious then, her voice hard to hear through her quiet sobs. "I hope I didn't pass it on to anyone."

Reassuring and comforting her, I check my scripts, but I have nothing there specifically for crying. So I make it up. I offer words of comfort I hope she can hear. I need my dates, I need my names. I listen and wait, and wait and listen and I get my database information.

She tells me about her routine; her hands are raw from the gloves and gel, she gets her food delivered. Where did she go wrong? Will she get sick, she wonders? I have no answers, I do not know. I spend more minutes on the phone with her, this frontline worker, I spend as much time as I can manage. I hope she will be all right.

I hang up and put my notes beside my computer. Knocking my face cream off my makeshift desk, I bend down to retrieve it, my elbow catching on my hairdryer hook, crashing it too to the ground. I leave it there – hoping I don't trip over it on the way down for dinner.

I check my watch. The walls are closing in on me already. Another six, maybe eight hours to go. I've been at for three. Contact tracing is a time sensitive issue, private, intrusive. No sharing of the details to anyone. I won't be stopping work till I get through the list.

The guilt of not helping my clients and colleagues in a direct, hands-on manner is depressing me. It's not my style. My family are happy I'm not on the frontline. The blinds are pulled down in my bedroom, the natural light far too bright for my computer screen. My arse is sore already.

I miss my workmates and the chat and my clients. I never thought I'd miss my work desk.

The days are blending into one. I know now it is a Sunday morning and the last time I worked weekends for this many hours straight was thirty years ago, scraping together my college fees.

I can smell the barbecue coals, still an hour or so from being ready. I hope he remembers to soak the skewers. I hope he gives me a dinner warning – I'd settle for a text with a time frame. I check my list, and put my headphones back on.

Time to do my bit. Time to make another call.

MY EXPERIENCE OF COVID-19

Marion
Co. Dublin

I like the song, "Look for the bare necessities, the simple bare necessities." In this song, "if you're as busy as a bee."

I have been busy as a bee during Covid-19. I felt like I was on another planet from all the media reports of people slowing down and taking up new hobbies. I am a healthcare worker who normally works with children with autism and learning disabilities. I heard through the HSE emails and through the news that Covid-19 was on its way.

When the schools closed, there was huge uncertainty in work. Then we were advised to work from home and postpone appointments. I took a week's annual leave that, luckily, I had to help my children get used to the shock of no school.

Then emails regarding redeployment came and colleagues all vanished off to test centres. I was sick with hayfever that turned into nasty bronchitis. Due to my symptoms and the fact that I was due to start working in a test centre, I had to have a Covid-19 test. It was thankfully negative. The test made me proud to work for the HSE and appreciate the volunteers who worked so hard and fast to set up test centres all over the country.

I then worked at my job at home while home-schooling. Thank God for the excellent Home School Hub, which gave me a break to check email and make calls.

In my HSE job, I was redeployed and worked at weekends in a test centre, so I could home-school my children and my husband could continue with his job.

I have an elderly father who lives on his own, so I brought him food supplies. He is an independent man, so I took a lot for him to ask. I was impressed that he did cocoon and mainly stuck to it. It was good for our relationship to meet him when he met no other person. He did talk a lot to his sister, who lives far away and was recovering from cancer. She is a much-treasured aunt. My sister was due a baby and my brother was busy in his job, getting people home from faraway places.

It took ages of frustrating attempts to use new technologies - seesawing for the home-schooling using one device and then eventually using an old computer. My children have had a huge learning in how to use devices.

Children are my heroes of Covid-19. They adapted brilliantly. My daughter was due to make her Holy Communion and had just done her First Confession. She was sad but accepted it would be postponed.

I have a good faith, passed down from my granny and aunt. I watched Mass online and really found great reassurance and leadership from the priests' sermons. A lot of priests are very vulnerable and I really admire the way they kept going and didn't cocoon, to help the people watching them. I offered to read at Mass, as the priest said he wanted one family per week reading. The priest contacted me saying he had an underlying issue, but kept working, and saw a 50% increase in funerals in April. He, like many older people, is scared.

It's awful to hear how people die alone. My own mother died three years ago and I couldn't imagine not being with her when she left this world. My heart goes out to all those who lost their lives during Covid-19, RIP. It's a time we will remember in history, and I like to think I and many others did our best.

NEW NORMAL

Louise
Co. Dublin

Redeployment: a word that instils both fear and pride as you up tools and join the frontline forces. Familiar faces and muffled chatter begin to take on a nervy atmosphere; suspicious of every new face and what ill they might bring. No friendly welcome; we continue to walk.

We enter a small quiet office, walls filled with posters of best practice care and vibrant coloured bar charts.

“Thanks for coming. It’s worse than we thought. More staff are calling in sick.” That’s our welcome, induction and handover of all we needed to know.

We make our way onto the ward to begin our new normal.

“Here, you’ll need a mask.” A hand of friendship and secrecy to a chosen few. Survival of the fittest and those privy to where the masks are stashed.

Patients smile as new faces present new opportunities to persuade just-arrived staff for extra biscuits or longer smoking breaks. Those in a world of their own seem safer and content at their blissful obliviousness of the chaos around. Envy flashes momentarily.

One side of the ward is taken over as a Covid-19 suspect cohort. Soon the dreaded news of a positive case begins to filter. The already suspicious atmosphere turns to one of unnerving reality. Suddenly people are disclosing underlying medical conditions or living with vulnerable family members.

Duties are assigned. As young, fit, able and new, subconsciously I am deemed less risky and less vulnerable and so I am assigned to take over the clients’ care. Full of confidence and naivety, you do as you are assigned, gown up and take position to do your duties. Take one for the team.

On arrival back to the ward, the atmosphere is buzzing with whispers of curiosity.

“How was it?”

“Did they have symptoms?”

And as the questions dwindle, curiosity is ousted and suspicion seeps in. “No, you stay up there in case you’re needed again.”

Day after day, as the news of more positive cases is announced, more familiar faces gown up and join you in your duties. No longer them and you, it’s them and us. A shared bond of duty, courage and loyalty to our professions. We laugh and joke with hidden smiles, as all that can be seen is our eyes. Work becomes our safe place.

To the outside world we must act with caution as if we too are infected. The unspoken conse-

quence of treating disease.

“How’s work?” My parents ask, both out of solace and concern.

Do I answer honestly that each day is faced with fear and trepidation as we greet the harsh reality of death and suffering, or do I offer a comforting answer so as not to concern them further?

“It’s fine, getting busier but manageable.” This becomes my honest response. It’s sufficient; enough information to comfort my parents but also close the conversation.

“How’s all at home?”

“Same old, same old.”

Monotonous and repetitive, but those phone calls become the lifeline of human interaction. A glimmer of what it is to be a person and not an employee embodied by one’s job.

Day after day, as the news of more positive cases is announced, more patients move from other wards to our cohort. New and familiar faces enrolled to gown up and join us in our duties.

Unexpected news - a patient has tested negative. They have recovered from Covid-19. The atmosphere turns to one of triumph and celebration, similar to that of Italia 90. And although brief, it is the victory we needed. Most definitely the light at the end of the tunnel that we didn’t know we needed or were hoping for.

Hope that things might return to normal; hope that I might get to sit across the kitchen table and honestly answer my parents when they ask, “How’s work?” Hope that, despite everything, if our vulnerable patients can beat Covid-19, that we must persevere and continue to fight and abolish Covid 19’s reign of terror.

REALITY BITES

Niall
Co. Wexford

Wasn't it great to wake up these Covid mornings, with nothing to do and the whole day stretching out in front of you?

For once to have time to do nothing except garden and paint and catch up on postponed reading, held off for overseas vacations or weekends away. And now we are stuck in splendid isolation, with nowhere to go and nowhere to be.

Wasn't it great, just to have time to listen to early morning birdsong, to watch spring blossom and come to life, and love the day ahead? To scroll down the TV and catch up on box set DVDs and Netflix and to finish long-fingered odd jobs.

"The garden never looked better," I hear you say.

Wasn't it great, to have time to sit in silence, to clear your head, to go for socially distanced walks? To have time to gather thoughts, to take stock of life. To have time to find yourself, time to fire up the BBQ, time to relax and sip beer on warm evenings, as the sun sets on another day. As fire embers glow in the firepit.

Wasn't it great to look on from a safe distance as the world shut down?

To watch the six o'clock news, to listen to Tony Holohan give us the numbers and keep the ship steady, steering us to dry dock and safety.

Wasn't it surreal to see a fox stroll up Grafton Street in the middle of the day, and the RTÉ News close with Derek Mahon's poem?

Everything Is Going To Be All Right

"There will be dying, there will be dying,

But there is no need to go into that..."

Wasn't it unreal, to watch from afar as the virus spread, everywhere but here, in China and Italy and Spain, and see Boris bumble and fumble and America brought to its knees?

"I can't breathe!"

Glad it was all a million miles away from my comfortable cocooned back garden.

Till out of the blue - I get the news that Joan, an old friend from years back, was admitted to hospital. With heart palpitations and finding it hard to catch her breath. With a diagnosis of Covid-19.

And then they found a shadow on her lung that turned out to be cancer and within a week she was gone.

And we couldn't go to her funeral to meet old friends, to grieve, to catch up, to sip tea and eat buns, to shake hands, to be "sorry for your troubles." To say our goodbyes, to remember, to laugh and cry and hug. To share stories of Joan the nurse, kind and gentle who loved the craic and laughter and messing and who didn't want to retire.

And in the blink of an eye, Joan became a Covid-19 statistic on the six o'clock news that evening, as Dr Holohan went through the numbers. And that wasn't fair - she was so much more than a statistic.

Joan was my friend. She was a friend of us all; all of us who worked and nursed together down the years in Kildare.

And she was the kindest person in the world.

She was a mother, a wife, a nurse, a great neighbour, great fun, a great friend to all she met.

And so much loved by all of us.

It's just not fair. Is it?

As reality bites.

The number of deaths increases.

And we stay home. Helpless.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Seosamh
Co. Cork

Mon 20th April 2020 @ 07:00 hrs: Surgical mask on. Check. Surgical gloves on. Check. And surgical gown on. Check. I can now enter the psychiatric hospital where I work as a mental health nurse.

Today I will put on this personal protective equipment (PPE) and take it off again at least four times. The masks must be changed every two hours according to guidance. I will try to keep two metres away from all other staff and clients throughout the day. There are black and yellow stripes stuck on to the floor throughout the hospital to help me maintain this safe distance. It's not always possible to keep this safe distance; it's a psychiatric hospital and the unexpected can unexpectedly happen.

09:00hrs: I unlock a large steel door and go outside for a moment to take off my mask and breathe in some fresh air. I close my eyes for a moment and try to process what is going on.

Tue 31st December 2019 @ 05:00 hrs: *Beautiful Vision*, a song by Van Morrison which I have chosen as my alarm call on my phone, wakes me up on this beautiful crisp New Year's Eve morning. I turn on the radio beside my bed to hear the news. The newsreader tells me "a case of pneumonia of unknown cause has been reported to the World Health Organisation. The outbreak was first identified in Wuhan, China."

I turn off the news and get ready to go to the local community mental health centre where I work as a psychiatric nurse. Gloves, masks and gowns are never donned here.

Thur 30th January 2020. The World Health Organisation declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

Sat 29th February 2020. First case detected in Ireland.

Thur 12th March 2020. The Taoiseach announces the closure of all schools and education settings for a period until 29th March 2020.

Sun 15th March 2020. The Government calls on all pubs to close until at least March 29th 2020.

Tue 17th March 2020. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar delivers a rare national address in which he warns elderly citizens and those with long-term illnesses will be asked to stay at home for several weeks as the Government grapples with the mounting crisis.

Tue 24th Mar 2020 @ 05:00hrs: I wake up to Van the Man serenading me with *Beautiful Vision*. I don't turn on the radio to hear the news. I have enough worries now. My wife is staying at home with our four children. Last week my wife was working and all the children were attending school.

I have been redeployed to a locked psychiatric unit one hour away from home where I now work one-hour shifts. Taking into account the drive there and back, it's a 14-hour day from home until I return again.

There is a confirmed Covid-19 patient in seclusion on the ward. Gloves, masks and gowns are now part of my dress code every day. I say goodbye to my family, who are all staying at home and will not go further than the garden, which is in line with government restrictions.

Twenty minutes into my journey I am stopped by the Gardaí at a routine checkpoint asking where I am travelling to and from? I show my nursing Identity card and am waved on. Just as I enter the city, I am again stopped by Gardaí at a routine checkpoint and once again I show my identity and am waved on. I know most of these guards now, and most of them recognise me as I am stopped at least four times every day on my journey to and from work.

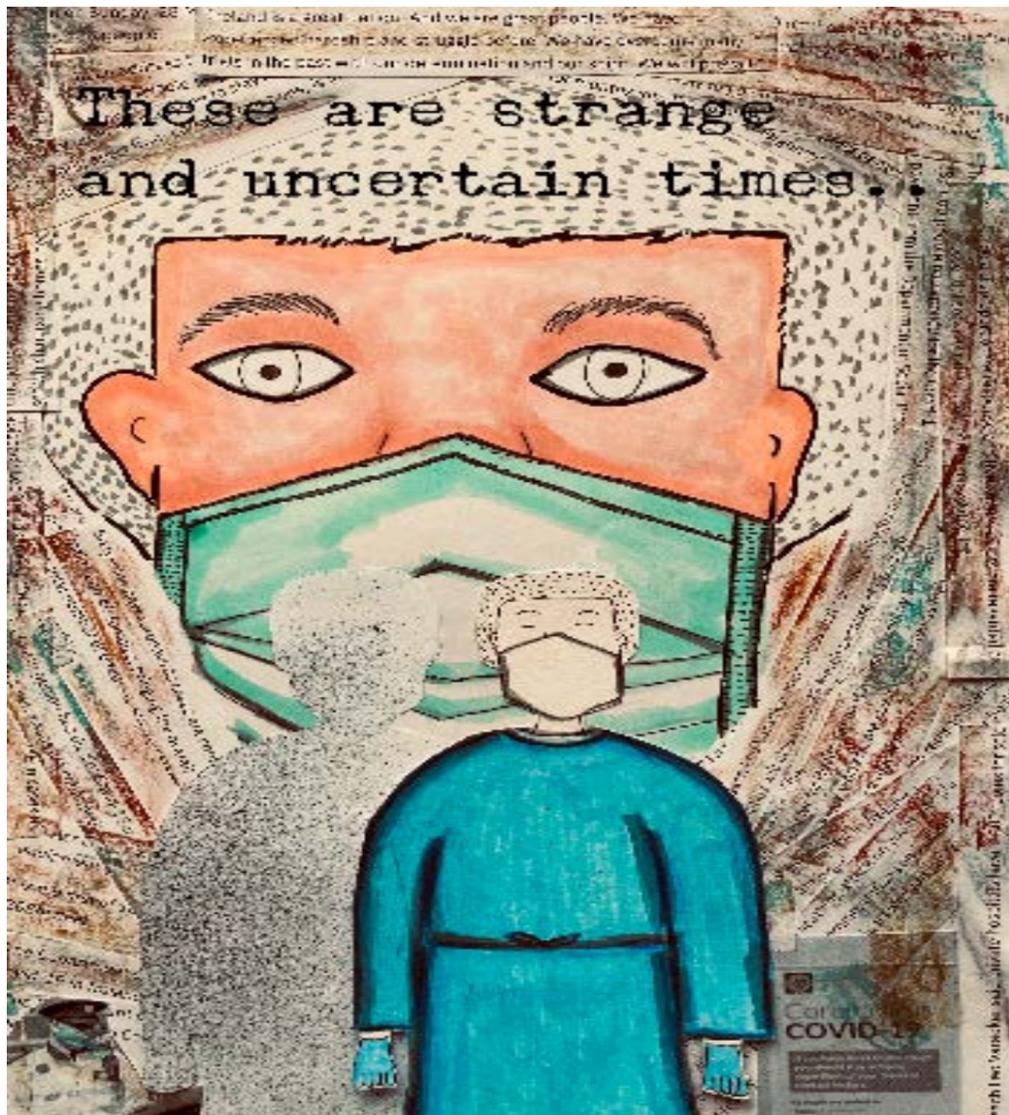
At 07:00hrs I arrive in work. I put on my gown, gloves and mask and set about my daily tasks. At

10:00hrs I need to leave the ward to have a break. I take off my PPE and dispose of them in the hazardous waste bin. At 10:15hrs I enter the ward and go through the process of putting on all my PPE again. At 13:00hrs it's time for some lunch. I dispose of all my PPE in the hazardous waste bin and go outside to breathe some fresh air. At 13:30hrs break is over. I go back inside and put on my PPE and set about my tasks. At 17:00hrs I need to go for a break and again take off my PPE and dispose of them safely. At 17:15hrs I again put on my fresh PPE and enter the ward. At 19:00 hrs, shift is over and I take off my PPE and put it in the hazardous waste bin for the last time today.

I get into my car and clean my hands with the bottle of the alcohol-based disinfectant that lives in my coffee holder. I am stopped by the Gardaí on two occasions again on my homeward journey.

At 20:00 hrs, I arrive home and go straight to the shower room before any physical contact with anyone in my family. All my clothing is put in the washing machine and the dial set to a very hot wash. Fresh clothing on, I sit down and have some time with my family. I worry I might contract this virus and bring it home to my family. I have told the children it's best not to hug or kiss me for the time being. These are strange and uncertain times. At 22:00hrs, I say goodnight and exhausted, I collapse onto my bed.

Tomorrow I will put gloves, gown and masks on, gloves, gown and masks off. Disinfect my hands. Wash my clothes on a hot wash. Stop at Garda checkpoints. Keep two metres from everyone on the ward if possible, but it's not always possible. The unexpected can unexpectedly happen.



BATTLING COVID CURVES

Shane
Co. Dublin

“It’s strange times we are living in, strange times.”

I have heard this so many times over the past few weeks. Covid this, Covid that. So many things are suffering during this time, not to mention my hands from antiseptic gels, which you should have a nice stock of, as it may become currency.

People going for a walk and taking their life in their hands. Again, it’s not really the fear of someone coughing on you, but the risk that they may get a belt of a car when trying to avoid you. Strange things like seeing people driving a car on their own with a mask and gloves on they have been wearing all day. Taking the gloves off with their teeth to answer their phone.

Doing zoom calls and quizzes on Friday nights, many people talking at once. “Read out that question again!”

Home-schooling a five- and six-year-old, with a one-year-old pulling out of your leg for a rice cake. Trying to teach the new way to read called polyphonics, where you have to sound the letters. At the same time worried about your neighbours thinking your house is a zoo with these sounds, while the kids’ teachers are sipping on a margarita for breakfast (I can see the umbrellas in their glasses now). Oh yes, strange times.

One thing that has come to light is that when routine goes, it’s so easy for everything to follow suit. I’m talking about health and healthy habits. As most of you reading this will relate to, some good habits have been introduced into your life and some bad ones too.

If you recognise the name Joe Exotic from Netflix, you have probably hit an all-time low in TV viewing. Positive to that, though, is that the next fancy dress is sorted, so that’s a plus. However, binge-watching TV isn’t a plus. It increases sedentary time, which is obviously not a plus for your health. It has also been found that when sitting in front of TV that long, every time your arm bends your mouth opens. Yes, I’m talking about the mindless munching, and sure, blaming it on Covid and strange times.

Reports have it that Smyths Toys are releasing a new doll post-pandemic and in time for Christmas called “Carbie.” Let’s talk about what we are drinking while watching Joe Exotic limp around, while suffering from the bent arm and mouth condition. It might not have an umbrella in it like the teachers, but it could have been triple distilled, with two blocks of ice, slice of lemon and in an expensive glass you bought off Amazon the week before when you got notions (just talking about a lad I know).

Now that we have covered how most of us have been on the slippery slope with the bad habits, I’ll explore some positive changes that can be applied to promote improved behaviours for both physical and mental health.

A person’s mental health needs to be supported at this time when isolation from family and friends is commonplace and work colleagues are the mainstay during this hard time. Speaking from personal experience working in a community mental health team, staff have kept morale high by cooking a lunch every Friday, which promoted a strong bond within the team. Now this might seem something small in the current climate, but offering that group support and acknowledgement that we are all in this together offers its own comfort. It is also important to stress that some of the cooking would test your immunities and your digestive health.

Other positive steps taken are lunchtime walks during the week promoting good physical activity habits. National and international recommendations state that adults should be getting at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five times a week. That alone with moderate diet

changes can halve the risk of Type 2 diabetes and heart disease, reduce stress and prevent anxiety and depression.

Being mindful of eating, especially while watching TV, could save so many unwanted calories and reducing sedentary time can have a positive impact physically and mentally. As we tried to flatten the curve, new curves have been developed.

Phase Two of opening up the country has started. After weeks of being locked in and isolating and being totally comfortable in your own skin, we can now meet up to six people at a time with the two-metre gaps. This can cause some social anxiety or “the fear,” depending on your liquid habits in the past couple of months.

Working in mental health, there is an expected fall-out post-Covid of people needing a lot of supports. I’m sure there will be an increase in depression and anxiety as unemployment has risen, alcohol consumption has increased as has domestic abuse.

Covid-related deaths and new cases will continue to fall due to the restrictions that were put in place and the hard work of our fellow frontline workers. Mental health services will be called upon more than ever in the hard times ahead, supporting those who will find it difficult to cope.

It’s a time to be mindful of others and how everyone might be affected differently. It’s a time to go that extra mile to check in on family and friends. One of the main signs of low mood and depression is a person isolating themselves. Don’t let that get lost in the disguise of Covid isolation. That can easily be done as these are “strange times.”

THOUGHTS UNLOCKED

Sharon
Co. Dublin

Secretly enjoy the lockdown in the beginning, but don't admit it. Enjoy this kind of strange beautiful holiday from real life. Stay in one place longer than you have in years. Worry about the raging pandemic going on outside and your powerlessness to protect your loved ones from it.

Stay home, drink tea, drink wine, dance, read books, cook, talk to family and friends online more than you ever have before. Miss your family and friends. Worry a little more. Push the worry away with mindfulness and yoga and alcohol gel. Talk about virus with nurse housemates. Think about life.

Remember all the things you already knew before but forgot. Enjoy the free time that was once filled with brunch dates, holidays, weddings, parties and unnecessary journeys. Save money from not doing afore-mentioned things. Worry slightly that you should have started to save money before this. Buy expensive active wear to avoid saving too much money, as it is just not who you are.

Walk to the local park in your new gear and comment on how busy it is. Run a bit and then stop because you don't like running, but you do it because you know that it's good for you. Observe novice runners huffing and puffing in their new active wear. Think you have Covid. Check your temperature. Get a swab. Try to get a tan sitting on the front step of your house.

Watch people in the housing estate wave at loved ones from afar. Notice the signs and flags in people's windows supporting the nurses and other frontline workers. Get goosebumps. Be glad you're a nurse and can help.

Chat to someone on a dating app then stop. Worry that real life may never resume. Feel guilty and stressed about not doing study and assignments for your postgrad course, because really, this is the perfect time. Miss your family a lot and all you want to do is hug them, though you're not usually the hugging type. Worry that they are worried about missing mass and hugging their grandkids. Worry that you are worrying them because you work in healthcare and can't go home.

Try and keep up with ever-changing guidelines. Clean. A lot. Wear PPE. Wear masks. Don't waste PPE. Worry about not having enough PPE. Start to think that the doctor who wore leather driving gloves, ski goggles and a poncho to do her assessments with patients in early March might have been onto something. Watch your already problematic skin deteriorate from mask wearing. Shower. A lot. Carry bags of potentially infectious garments home. Develop skin issues on your already problematic skin from mask wearing. Shower. A lot. Carry bags of potentially infectious garments home to put straight in the washing machine.

Wear scrubs from your old job because the mental health services don't have a budget to provide scrubs. Realise the scrubs say 'labour ward' and this might cause confusion. Assure people that they are not delusional and that they are not in labour.

Watch Tiger King. Be subconsciously influenced to wear leopard print. Eat the food donated to frontline workers. Feel overwhelmed with people's support and gratitude. Think that maybe this pandemic has reminded everyone of the work that we do every day. Feel respected. Watch your housemates come home exhausted, sweaty and worried about patients. Talk about how this virus is like nothing modern medicine has ever dealt with before. Take turns having emotional outbursts as a group of nurses living together during a pandemic.

Think that you're really not enjoying lockdown anymore. Think you should have done teaching. Think about how the lovely old lady that says that she's delighted to see you with a beaming smile in a thick Dublin accent and the utmost of sincerity makes it all worthwhile. Think that her laugh is infectious. Think that, as you help her do her hair before her videocall with her family, that it is truly a privilege to be able to care for her. Worry that you could unknowingly give her Covid. Think that wearing the masks has somehow affected your sense of hearing and that you have some kind of previously undiagnosed hearing impairment.

Think that climate change might reverse and start to be hopeful about the future. Think that the pandemic has brought out the best in humanity. Try to calm the hysteria in the WhatsApp groups. Watch Love is Blind and remember that you're still single. Wish you were New Zealand but be glad you're not Britain. Try to convince people with psychosis and viral symptoms to let you stick a swab in their throat and really, really far up their nose. Use alcohol gel till your hands are raw and red and sore and all your nails become little stumps. Try to reassure people with paranoia and anxiety related to the pandemic, although you are not reassured yourself. Try to convince people experiencing paranoia that Covid isn't something fictitious that we are telling people in an attempt to control them. Try to convince them to follow guidelines. Try to explain why they can't see their family and friends. Try to explain to people who are mentally unwell why they have to stay in isolation while dressed like you are heading into nuclear battle.

Get your free coffee from the petrol stations giving frontline workers free coffee and think about how you can't believe your luck. Skip the long queue for the supermarket with your head down, avoiding eye contact with anyone except the man you have to flash your work badge at. Smile at him as he waves you in, but notice that he steps back a little bit further because you might be contagious. Think about how nice it is to feel appreciated as a profession, even if people are scared of you now.

Watch the news. Be grateful to your nation for flattening the curve. Feel glad our Taoiseach is a doctor. Go home and see your family when restrictions lift and you haven't been in contact with any known Covid cases. Cry when you hug them because you're emotionally unstable at the best of times and they were really good hugs. Think your family might be the best people in the world, but spend a week at home and remember that we all have faults. Wish you had a crying, laughing, face emoji to insert after the last comment. Worry after you leave that you might have given them Covid. Watch Normal People though you've already read the book and think that maybe you should become a writer. Think that you should probably stick to nursing.

Think that maybe someday you will write something about nursing. Do that.

SILENCE
Sheila
Co. Offaly

Silence. Stillness.

Empty skies. Empty roads. Empty car park. Empty corridors. Empty wards. Empty A&E!!

It's April 2020.

The quietness is eerie. A busy busy hospital hushed to a deadly silence. No activity, no patients, no visitors.

Except there is activity. Behind the doors of ICU, we know staff are doing everything in their power to keep patients alive. Covid wards are off limits, as we glimpse staff in full PPE taking care of their charges.

We in Clinical Engineering are working manically to cope with this, trying to be prepared for... who knows! Absolutely nobody knows. This is the great leveller.

Areas are being reconfigured, some departments closed or moved off-site for the protection of vulnerable patients. Other areas, such as our A&E and ICU, are being extended and redesigned to accommodate Covid and non-Covid. Equipment is being stored, relocated, commissioned, serviced, installed, modified; from ventilators to thermometers to infusion pumps, all critical in the fight against this tiny virus.

Our hearts thumping out of our chests as we don PPE for the first time to enter ICU.

And all this while, I watch friends on Facebook post photos of freshly painted houses, manicured gardens, projects completed and I don't have time to even tidy my bedroom! People exclaiming "What day of the week is it?"

We know what day it is as we chase orders, keep maintenance schedules on critical care equipment, prepare equipment for use in unknown scenarios. It's extraordinary.

Now August 2020, the "new normal" starts with restrictions and masks. A second wave may hit, we all hope and pray that it won't.

My heroes? My colleagues here in the hospital of course and all the workers who continued to provide essential services during lockdown – shop workers, delivery drivers, etc. But my superhero? My teenage daughter, who dealt with isolation, who dealt with the concerns for her mother going to work every day, who dealt with no socialising, with all events that she had been looking forward to such as festivals, all cancelled. And through it all, maintained her sanity by exercising, reading, eating well.

The world is filled with heroes and superheroes who have made the sacrifices and adapted to a new world; a world where there seems to be a bit more kindness and patience and re-evaluation of what is really important.

MRS FAGAN FINDS AN ANSWER

Ted
Co. Wexford

There were no great accidents of fate in Sally's life. No lucky breaks that suddenly turned the everyday on its head; none of the weird and wonderful things that remain the mainstay of countless movies and make daydreaming respectable by camouflaging it as hope. *Humdrum* was about the kindest word she could find to describe it. Ordinary was the one used by her mother about herself, but Sally hated that word.

"No-one's life is *ordinary*, Mam," she'd say and deflate the effect by following up with, "Not even yours."

Years later, when Sally herself was married and had children of her own, the word ordinary seemed to fit all too snugly into the routine of her housewifery. It was only ever in her diary that she felt she made an impact; felt that her private thoughts could be as Bohemian or scandalous as anyone else's.

The day before her wedding she wrote, *I know I don't really understand what the word 'love' means. How could I? As Dad keeps saying, "Nobody at nineteen knows about love, or anything else for that matter!" And maybe it's true, but right now I don't care, and not because I'm dying to have a home of my own or because Lee is sooo good looking, or because I'm pregnant. But because there's nothing else for me in this house, nothing by way of developing, I mean. I know my parents' views on everything. I know my younger sister is prettier and brighter and more loved than me. I know my brothers are just kids and will all end up working in Guinness's alongside Dad, and this baby, if I stayed, would follow them. I know all that and I can't stand it.*

Sally made an entry in her diary most days, even if it was only to record what she'd cooked for tea or who she'd talked to in the estate. Her mother, June Fagan, called around one afternoon when she knew Lee would be at work and told her she had some news. Though over sixty, June retained something of a youthful air about her and had an attractive way of smiling that made people feel automatically at ease in her company

"What's up, Mam?" Sally asked and sipped a little of the tepid coffee she'd left on the breakfast counter earlier that lunchtime.

"It's nothing serious. Well, I mean, it's nothing bad, nothing medical or anything."

"What is it?" Sally wiped the cold taste of coffee from her lips with the back of her hand.

Behind her rouged cheeks, June was blushing and her voice when she spoke was a high-pitched giggle. "I've got a fella," she said and broke out laughing, closing her face in her hands and turning her head into her chest.

"What?"

"I've got a fella. I know, it's mad, isn't it, at my age?"

"You've got a fella?"

"Yeah, I know. It's terrible, isn't it?" she said again, half-laughing and craning her head back into her chest.

Sally touched the top of her mother's sandy-yellow hair; June turned her face into her daughter's embrace.

"I never meant to meet anyone after your father, Sal. Y'know that, don't you?" she said quietly from behind her tears.

Sally pulled back a little so she could look at her. "I know, Mam, but it's not a bad thing. I'm sure Dad would be delighted you found someone else."

"I never liked to say, darling," June began, "but I've been so lonely these last few years. What with not sleeping and . . ." She paused and looked away. "And not even, y'know, having a hand to hold?"

She cleared her throat and spoke more boldly. "Martin's a godsend, I have to say that. I mean it, Sal, a real godsend."

"I'm glad, Mam," Sally said sincerely and let her mother talk some more about Martin and what he did for a living and where he lived and what his intentions were.

In the bathroom that night, after the kids had been fed and Lee was settled in front of the box, Sally sat on the en suite loo and wrote up her dairy: *Mam has a boyfriend, at her age! I can't believe it. I suppose, if I'm honest, I'm disappointed . . . a little jealous maybe. I never thought she'd even consider another man after Dad. I thought love was supposed to be forever, true love, I mean. It seems odd to think of her with someone else, nice but ugly at the same time.*

I wonder will there ever be anyone else in my life apart from Lee? A sneaky part of me likes the idea, but I know I could never do anything about it. And it's hardly going to magically happen that one morning after leaving the kids to school some hunk appears at my front door! I'm not the type anyhow, too unadventurous, too plain. Mam says her prayers have been answered and I'm glad for that.

I've suddenly started to think of Lee Óg again, and his tiny body lost in that cheap white coffin the undertakers put him in before we had a chance to change it. Dad's first grandchild. I'd like to have seen him grow up . . . the sort of man who'd buy his mother lunch or bring her to the park or pick her up after bingo. I still miss knowing that's never going to happen, even after all these years. And I still say the odd prayer that he's okay, and not lonely or afraid. Silly, isn't it? Silly but real . . .

REFLECTIONS OF A FRONTLINE HEALTH WORKER

Anonymous

Disembarking off a warm plane in early morning sunshine, I did not expect to be greeted by a man in a hazmat suit. I noted the rising anxiety as we moved through the terminal; the polite, yet assertive staff channelling people into various lines and questioning their country of origin. As I moved through the throngs and saw the large illuminated signs in relation to Covid-19, my mind was no longer filled with images of long afternoon strolls, but wet markets and ghost cities in Wuhan, China.

As a frontline worker I am accustomed to and prepared for infections, but I wondered silently about the existence of a contagion that we were not fully prepared for.

Then, after returning home, images appeared gradually as I watched the morning news while busy-ing around the lunches, unfinished homework and forgotten discarded musical instruments. I saw the images of morgues in Italy and lines of lorries taking bodies for speedy burials.

At work I saw worry in faces of my patients and carers.

“They say it’s going to be as bad as the Spanish flu.”

“They are stocking up on body bags you know.”

I balked at such an overreaction, surely this couldn’t be so. I was reluctant to become a slave to all this overreaction, especially as the communication from the top was eerily quiet.

Time passed; the roads to my work became more deserted and people cancelled their appointments. The carers and professionals they once had in their homes and in clinics now posed a serious risk to them. It was becoming clear an enemy was coming, silent and deadly. In a deep communication vacuum, I had such an unease that we were unprepared.

Quickly messages started to come about social distancing, handwashing, respiratory etiquette, but the message was clear from above that we could not cancel frontline services.

In the midst of this crisis, we also had initial issues with access to protective equipment. I can remember being absolutely frozen with fear and panic, fearful for the vulnerability of those I served and for the health of those I care for at home. Directives were given: staff must be directed to swabbing clinics, or else directed to hospital redeployment. I pondered this and thought of the similarity of this and a wartime sketch.

As I walked into my work setting one day, I heard the hushed tones of the staff as they listened to their own manager anticipating their own roadmap for safety.

Little did I know that the following day, with a full caseload of clients to see, there was a padlock on the door of the centre. And, when the manager could be contacted, he said he would be closed for the foreseeable due to his own organisation’s concern about health staff working in the building.

I sat outside the padlocked gates, feeling like a pariah. My fear and uncertainty were palpable. I tried to make sense of what was going on but there was just no frame of reference. This was going to be a game of survival.

A resourceful colleague quickly came up with an accommodation option in a currently unused facility with a friendly caretaker and support staff. I have to say I was never as glad to see a friendly face.

I quickly tried to evaluate the situation and discern how I could continue to connect with my most vulnerable and needy client. I made telephone contact with them. Their response was heart-warming.

The husband of one of my most vulnerable said, “Even though we know that you cannot come into our home, we need to hear your voice and that you are there if we need you.”

For me, this was the fuel to keep going. We still await formal platforms to provide services remotely; there was no substitute for the sound of a familiar voice.

While we await formal direction on many things, I have learned about the importance of listening; not to respond or come up with some short-term fix for a longer-term problem but to really listen and be present. It felt odd to say, “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure.” Honesty was welcomed by our service users as we lay in a no man’s land of uncertainty. This was not a time for heroic leadership.

The Covid-19 phenomenon has affected me in so many ways.

For one, I have become incredibly grateful that my family, my co-workers and my own health have

all been preserved. Some of those whom I have worked with over the years have not. The grief and pain of not holding a funeral or having a wake is tangible and enduring and only compounds their loss and bereavement.

Following the initial consternation and chaos, I took a step back to look at the bigger picture. Covid-19 will be with us for the long haul and, with best practice advice and access to PPE, we can still make a difference and shape our services around the people we serve. We will continue to do our best.

We can wait for the direction of superiors about service proposals that will breeze into our in-boxes, along with token emails about mental health. There is an onus on us as individuals to look after our own mental health and the wellbeing of our families.

One particularly demanding task is the challenge of home schooling on top of frontline duties. It is an unwelcome additional undertaking as I play a one-handed game of tennis, batting away the abundance of emails and tasks that arrive. I have to remind myself, as I evaluate the impact of all this change and quietly sense a fragment of optimism and confidence, to take a breath and say, just enough is fine...



THE MONSTER: A JOURNEY THROUGH DARKNESS

Breda
Co Limerick

Such a mix of emotions - frightened, tired, sad. Strained conversations, frantic Googling of worldometers. The monster that is Covid-19 has infiltrated our lives; changed them forever.

Sick to the pit of my stomach, tears streaming down my face watching unfolding scenes in Italy, watching the army trucks carrying bodies from Bergamo. They are not bodies; they are people like you and me that love and are loved, heartbroken for their families and heartbroken for others.

So many messages: you should wear masks, you shouldn't wear masks, everyone should be working from home. Social media medical experts calling for lockdown. Lockdown; what will that mean? Do we have enough food? Should I run to Centra on the way home and get supplies – how much supplies for how long?

Coming home from work, hands peeling from washing and disinfectant. Looking at my husband – is he okay? Does he look different from this morning? How will he fare out if he catches the monster? Knowing the answer but not wanting to know. More tears. Unlikely that someone with chronic heart failure would survive the monster. Heartbroken again. Love him so much. Twenty-eight years together. What would I do? How will I keep him safe?

Move to spare room, shower when I come from work, designate separate bathroom for him only. Girlchild and boychild will have to take their chances with me and the monster. Looking at their pale faces; worried about life, worried about Dad, worried about Mum. Lots of worry, too much at 17 and 21.

Lockdown called. Hubby cocooning; monster knocking on the door. I'm still working, the only one leaving the house. I am the risk to my lovely family. Sending messages to girls' WhatsApp group - sisters and nieces usually for jokes and chats or both:

Tell them all I'm crying for us, for those we love and for our little country.

I am so sad and scared in equal measure.

Similar messages coming back; sister and nieces in other countries all having the same fears and emotions.

Constant questions from girlchild: why can't you stay at home from work? Why can't you work from home? "I can't" is the answer, but it does not feel like the right answer. I have to go to work. I am a public servant and my job is to serve the patients of the mid-west and there is nothing else to be said.

"So the patients of the mid-west are more important than Dad?"

That stopped me in my tracks. "Well no, nothing is more important than Dad and both of you, but I have to go to work."

Again comes the question. "Why?"

She is 21 so I can't say because I said so! I thought, but only for a split second. I answered simply, "For me to stay at home, or insist on working from home, would be morally wrong and in my opinion, unpatriotic and I won't do that. That isn't how I brought up."

Instantly think of Mam and Dad, both gone over ten years, thought of every day and missed. For the first time in that length of time, I'm glad that they are not here anymore and that makes me sad and I cry again.

I feel split in two; my gut telling me as a public servant, going to work is the right thing to do. My heart telling me stay at home and put my arms around my husband and children.

Looking at my amazing children, so kind, clever and witty, how will they manage when hubby and I pass away from Covid-19? Because that is today's mood. I'll get it at work and I'll give it to him and we will die and our children will be orphaned. Have we done enough to make them self-sufficient? Have we done our job well? We will miss out on so much. Utterly terrifying and so dreadfully sad.

Sitting in the office planning for every eventuality, but none of them good: extra ventilators, extra ICU beds, surge, wave. Overwhelmed by all these words that conjure up a tsunami. And that's how my brain feels - as if it has been hit by a massive tsunami, blowing my loyalties apart.

In what order do I put them? Work versus home, work versus husband, work versus family. Curling into a ball versus getting up and getting dressed and getting out to work. And balancing that with keeping my family safe as I am the only one leaving the house.

Extra mortuary capacity, hundreds of body bags now. They nearly put me over the edge because I saw the faces of loved ones in those spaces and in those body bags. No sleep that night.

Shattered from worry, but so much respect for HSE staff across all grades and all frontline workers. Heartening to see. I am making a difference. How long will it last? How soon will people forget?

New normal. Everyone is a risk to me and my family treat them as such. No handshakes, no hugs even for husband and children. Keep a two-metre distance, even from the ones I love the most.

The monster is being controlled, beaten back by the collective effort of our nation. Proud to be Irish, not so scared anymore. Is it getting easier or am I just getting used to it? No more talk of extra mortuary capacity, no more seeing the faces of my family in the body bags. Wear masks, don't wear masks - still going on. Lockdown is easing.

Was it easier to live in lockdown? Is it scarier now that everyone is getting back to normal? This monster is sleeping, not dead. Still watching the figures every day, but not totally consumed by the monster's every move.

The most precious people in my life are still alive. My friends and extended family are still alive. The monster did not get us. No longer do we watch every news bulletin to see what the monster is doing now.

The fear is still there, but it is controlled. We are in control of the monster now, not the monster in control of us. We will continue to live, laugh and love unconditionally.

REDEPLOYMENT BREAK UP DOESN'T DISCRIMINATE

Anonymous

A true account of my pandemic experience.

For me, that one time was the experience of redeployment to Cork University Hospital, just weeks after starting a permanent HSE job in Cork city.

My boyfriend broke up with me over the phone after eighteen months and my housemates discriminated against me for working in CUH during Covid-19 and ceased to communicate with me.

I never washed my hands as much. I never socially distanced as much. I never felt as aware of my sneezes and coughs. I never felt as isolated. I was never separated from my family for as long as three months.

For each and every one of us, Covid-19 will be remembered for different reasons. I'm 38 years old, have lots of experience and education, work-related and otherwise. I am a victim of sexual crime. I was unemployed before and after completing my degree in the recession, I've changed careers. I've been a mature student. I've been a reserve Garda. And lots and lots more. I've lived. I've challenged myself and I've faced up to my challenges.

It has been very hard to spend time away from family, not knowing when I would get back to Waterford to see them again. My family have been my rock and have stood by me through the good times and the bad. I have had plenty of dark days and nights in the past. Covid-19 has been no different.

I think tough times, dark days and real low points in life build resilience, and for me that has helped me to cope with the challenges of Covid-19. Once again, these difficult times reinforce the importance of family.

The staff of CUH have been incredible on the frontline, but also even more incredible behind the scenes and have been a tremendous support to me, for which I am so thankful. Covid-19 has also reinforced the importance of reaching out to people. Total strangers reached out to me in different ways, which was very touching, because I was always on my own. I met lots of people just by admiring their dogs on walks and chatting to elderly people who were just as lonely as I was.

The highlight of the pandemic for me was getting a letter from our fabulous president. It lifted my spirits in the depths of the crisis at the beginning. I had written a card to him, wishing him well during the pandemic and thought no more of it. A few days later I got a lovely letter back from his PA, which I wasn't expecting.

The pandemic has interfered with all our lives, but some more than others. Ultimately, I feel lucky I work at the back of the frontline in an admin support role.

Despite the upheavals, I am grateful for my health and my family's health. I am grateful for the leadership and expertise of our government and HSE officials. Definitely not forgetting all our non-HSE frontline staff, in particular the Gardaí, who I have a particular bias for. But they have done incredible work and a lot of it is unseen. All too often they are criticised, and yet every day they put their lives on the line to keep us all safe. Sadly, Colm Horkan is a tragic example of this.

COVIDENTIALLY YOURS

Bronagh
Co. Antrim

When lockdown was announced in the South on the 12th of March, we knew with certainty that this was what we in the North should be doing too.

Instead, teachers, parents and pupils in the North endured a further ten days of indecision and contradictory advice. Schools went into planning mode. My school closed to pupils on the three days following the St Patrick's Day break so that we could work out the best way forward. Our staff meetings, held in the Assembly Hall on socially distanced chairs, were surreal and ominous. The plans we made on each of those three days were inevitably turned on their head by government announcements on TV at 5:00pm.

In those three days I had meetings with colleagues, prepared home-learning packs and registered pupils and teachers for an educational software package. Over those days and at the weekend, I attended SLT (speech and language therapy) meetings and prepared to open my class for key workers' children on the following Monday. I hardly slept. I thought about possible protocols for staff and pupil safety, protocols for management of the classroom, playground and school environment and possible activities for children who would be feeling overwhelmed by this experience.

On Monday 23rd of March, while many of my colleagues distributed home-learning packs and guidance for online learning for our 900+ pupils, I worked with a year group colleague in my classroom and two of the five pupils I was expecting. There were supposed to be over forty pupils in the whole school, but about half of parents opted out at the last moment. Their fears and uncertainty were real too. When my pupils went home at 3.00pm, I brought tea and coffee to my colleagues who were still distributing the packs in the playground. I was exhausted. I had an awful headache. My body ached from moving tables and chairs to clear the room. I returned home and went straight to bed. When I woke at 8.00pm, I was running a high fever and the sleep hadn't done anything for my exhaustion. I was sick.

Three of my family are medics and on the Tuesday I was tested because they were now quarantined too. My fears were for my family, the teacher who worked alongside me on Monday, the children in my room and my colleagues. I felt sick and I felt guilty. The positive result that I received on Wednesday evening was devastating. Making that call to my principal was awful, because I knew the level of anxiety that it would bring to all those I worked with.

The illness progressed but by Day 7, I thought I was getting better. I stayed awake longer and was able to sit outside for a little while. I was optimistic. Around Day 10, things quickly changed. The fever, which hadn't broken, worsened and the headache was even more intense and constant. My breathing became rapid and I had a tingling in my face and in my arms and hands. My GP advised a check-up at the Covid A&E.

At the triage station, my husband wasn't allowed to come with me. I thought I'd come back out again after assessment, but I couldn't and I didn't see my husband again for another week. It was quickly established that I needed oxygen, IV antibiotics and that I had developed pneumonia in both lungs. I was transferred by ambulance to the Nightingale Hospital. Security staff blocked off corridors and held the lifts as I was brought from the ambulance to the ward.

My ward was a small, four-bed bay. We were at the start of this pandemic and procedures were new and evolving. The door to the corridor was kept closed. Nurses communicated with us about minor things through a baby monitor to reduce their exposure and the number of times they had to gear up in full PPE. I only got to know the nurses at observation times when each patient was monitored, or if the medical staff had a specific task to do. I found the distance created by the masks very sad and isolating but very necessary. The medical staff were amazing. They tried to normalise this very abnormal situation.

The first group of patients I was with were very elderly and very weak. The ward was silent. Mechanical beeps and the hiss of our oxygen masks were all I could hear. After a few days, two of the ladies were moved to a ward for geriatric patients. The third lady was discharged to a residential home. We now know that this was an ill-conceived policy that has had dire consequences for so many of our elderly and vulnerable people.

I wasn't alone for long. The next patient was also elderly, but she was very alert and very afraid. This was probably my most difficult time on the ward. With only a cloth curtain between us, I couldn't help but hear the kind and careful doctor explain to her the process of agreeing a DNR (do not resuscitate) order. She was so ill and so afraid. When the doctor left, I sat with her. I reminded her of the very thorough medical plan the doctor had outlined: a way forward, a way to recovery.

The next day two other patients arrived. One lady came from ICU and the other, like myself, had not expected to be separated from her partner so suddenly and be admitted to hospital. We all felt the strain of separation. I hadn't the strength to phone my husband or my family. Instead we kept in contact by text. I was too tired to talk and, honestly, it was just too difficult for me to talk about what I was going through. I kept them updated on each observation and told them that I loved them and missed them. I texted good morning. I texted goodnight.

As the antibiotics began to work and as my levels of need for oxygen reduced, I was able to take in more of what was going on around me. Our ward on the ninth floor had the most beautiful view over the city. The

dawns were spectacular and the city lights were a welcome reminder that everything would eventually get back to what it was. Because lockdown was so carefully adhered to, it was strange to see sun-soaked streets empty of children and the motorway so free of traffic. One of the tallest city centre hotels blinked its sign at us and kept its rooftop terrace lit against the night sky.

The three women I was with then - we've made it our goal to meet up again on that rooftop and I know we will.

After a week of hospital treatment I was ready to be discharged. I still don't know the faces of the nurses and doctors who cared for me, but I could not be more grateful. My journey home was emotional and my return to my family was wonderful.

It's been nearly four months since my discharge and I am still on the way to recovery. I get exhausted easily and I need to siesta like I was born to it. My breathing is not always good and my heart sometimes runs away with itself- all things that can happen after Covid-19. At times I find myself emotional and tearful. I'm not myself – yet. I avoid news updates on the virus. August is looming in my mind and I wonder if I will be well enough and strong enough for whatever shape the new academic year will take.

I suppose we all wonder about that.

THROUGH THE EYES OF A WARD CLERK

Catherine
Co. Cork

It was surreal, dystopian, our world changed overnight. Discarded face masks blew like tumbleweed down the deserted streets of Cork city. Daunted by the presence of the army erecting a large triage tent outside our emergency department. An enormous oxygen tank embedded in the road, with barriers and security guards protecting access.

No one entered without staff ID. Even clerical staff donned face masks, our hands drunk on the alcohol of sanitisers, which appeared to give birth by the hour, moving in and taking charge of every entrance and exit of every building. The canteen was gutted to one eighth of its capacity, allowing for two-metre spaced seating, yellow markers on the floor and Perspex screens at the cash desk.

But the most profoundly striking change was the total morphing of medical humanity into one green blur of scrubs. Last week we were a civilisation of people in suits and dresses and a variety of distinguishing uniforms. Now we were a turbulent sea of anxious green. Once the distinguishing property of surgeons and theatre staff, now these ominous pyjama like suits were everywhere, breathing portents of doom, they seemed to say, "Remember China, Italy, London...this is what's coming."

Every day we held our breath.

"Will it be today, this Armageddon....?"

"How fiercely will our lives have altered by the end of this shift?"

"Will we be able to hold it together?"

"Will we even be able to go home?"

Twice daily briefings and pep talks, the fear of bad news, the whispers and rumours, social network confusion, and scaremongering counteracted by a powerful sense of support and solidarity everywhere. We each carried the worry for our own people, our elders, our loved ones, will they be protected? Am I putting their lives in danger by coming to work? How would I live with myself if I brought home the virus?

I think, though, my outstanding memory of this time will be the day a miniature Superman sa-shayed into the children's unit for his weekly chemotherapy. His red cape was billowing behind him and he had that nonchalant certainty of victory that only a two-year-old hero can pull off. Oh, how I could have hugged his brave mother for her proverbial laugh in the face of adversity.

**THE DREAM TEAM
FIGHTING CORONAVIRUS TOGETHER**

Dr. Heera

It is with great pride that I write this to you all. The Dream Team as I've so called us at St Columba's Hospital (my Haven) is because we have all shown that at this very moment in time we have done only the very best that we could have ever hoped to have done at what is truly one of the worst and unprecedented times in the world. Thankfully we are almost out the other side, our close of outbreak being tomorrow. A few of us have war wounds, myself included having contracted Coronavirus. Luckily under the care of our respective doctors, the HSE, Public Health, Occupational Health and our Administration team we have all recovered well and are able to be back at work! I myself could not have asked for a better welcome back that I received from you all.

As you know I have been working as your Locum Medical Officer over the last 14 months. While I have worked at other Nursing Homes this one would be on a much bigger scale so was new to me last year and has thus been a learning curve for me. It was a very short curve because of the Nurses and staff in each ward who all had their unique abilities to show me how things are done at your Nursing Home thus giving me a firm foundation to do my job and handle with ease with all of you what was to come subsequently with Coronavirus. We have of course been blessed to have our Carlow/Kilkenny Public Health Team and Community Nursing Team who together with our most competent and ever ready Director of Nursing Office Team and us are still working tirelessly to guide us through this Pandemic that we are still facing.

All of the staff in each of the wards, administration, kitchen, cleaning and laundry staff, drivers and maintenance staff of St Columba's, new staff and old have done a fantastic job both working with Covid patients (something which has of course been quite new to us all and challenging but always met with enthusiasm to move ahead and get the job done) and those without Covid patients in trying to keep it out which has always been all of our main objectives from the start however one that is beyond our control.

You all have great teams and should be ecstatic that you've all worked so well together and done so well whilst having to stay apart. My time here at St Columba's has been some of the most pleasurable days I have had in all my time working in Ireland in the last 11 years. You are the Florence Nightingales of Society and should be proud to say that at this time when Nursing Homes worldwide are getting a bad rep we together with Public Health are doing a fantastic job! This is because our Dream Team @ St Columba's Hospital is made up of a lot of dedicated, professional and caring staff. We are all lucky to have each other. I can only say that my luck in being a part of your team is because my superstar Locum Agent, Tom Garvey from Med Doc, had placed me with you in what is the best place, at the perfect time and with the best people I could have ever asked to be working with in what I consider to be the best Nursing Home I have ever worked at!

Thank you all for being so supportive throughout the time I have been and will be your Medical Officer, especially at what has been our most trying time with Coronavirus. You have all been rock stars with helping implement all the directives from Public Health which have been ever changing due to ever changing nationwide criteria. You have all worked with such tremendous speed and such positive attitudes to get the job done almost as quickly as the words would have come out from us based on advice that would have been given by the Public Health Team. You are all so efficient that it leaves me no excuse but to always give my best to you in every situation! It feels more than wonderful to be welcomed everyday with smiling faces and waves from the time I enter the driveway of the Hospital until the time I leave.

There are some staff who have to be away due to family commitments, I wish them all the very best at this time and hope for them to be back soon because their expertise is surely

missed. There are staff who unfortunately due to Coronavirus cannot travel back to their respective countries to visit their families. Stay strong and have faith whilst trying to be practical about staying away as we are bound to by our duty on the frontline. The day you will be back to your family will be your proudest day yet and will be an attest to the heroics and discipline you all have shown to date. Keep up the good job in all being your very good, jovial selves! We have all shared and will continue to share a load of laughs because that's just the way we are and shall remain! We shall and will be ready if we're faced with any adversity in the future and so will be twice as prepared to shut it down almost as soon as it gets to our doorstep again if it should.

We need to continue to move ahead and work together while staying apart to fight the Coronavirus as this is now the new normal and something that we will all have to live with both within the hospital and out in the community which you've all been handling quite well! Keep smiling, shining and always be proud to stand together while physical distancing to stay safe. Keep each other in your family both at St Columba's and out of St Columba's safe as well. Always remember that YOU all are the very best of the best!

The collage of pictures illustrates how we have all moved ahead with the times from December 2019 to stop the spread of Covid-19 by physical distancing as we are now doing to protect each other together!

Lots of Love and physically distanced hugs to you all 😊



MAMAÍ
Ciara
Co. Dublin

AM

Páitse: A Mhamaí? Where are we going today?

Mamaí: Tá mise ag dul ag obair inniu agus ní féidir liom dul áit ar bith libhse.

Páiste: Arís!! Why isn't Daddy going to obair.

Mamaí: Ní chaithfidh Daidí dul ag obair faoi láthair.

Páiste: When will you be back?

Mamaí: Am leapa

Páiste: Aaaaawwww. That's a tamall fada!! Why do you have to go to obair?

Mamaí: Mar caithfidh Mamaí cabhrú le daoine nach bhfuil in ann siúl.

Páiste: Cén fáth?

Mamaí: Mar sin mar atá.

Páiste: Ach cén fáth nach bhfuil siad in ann siúl? Do they need the sticks to walk?

Mamaí: Maide croise? Uaireanta.

Páiste 2: A Mhamaí, I want bricfeasta. What do we have?

Mamaí: Cuir ceist ar Dhaidí, tá mé ag imeacht.

Páiste 2 (crying): But I want you to make it.

Mamaí: Ok ok ok. Brostaigh!! Ceard atá uait?

Páiste 2: Leite le mil.

Páiste 1: Where are we going with Daidí?

Páiste 2: Can we go to the páirc spraoi?

Mamaí: No. Ní féidir libh dul, tá siad ar fad dúnta de bharr an Coronavirus.

Páiste: UUggghhhh. When is the coronavirus going to be gone?

Mamaí: Níl a fhois agam a stór. Ach rachaimid chomh luath agus is féidir linn. Slán libh.

PM

Mamaí: Dia dhaoibh gach duine. Conas atá sibh?

Daidí: Hi Mamaí!! He only cried for one hour when you left his morning. (sigh)

Mamaí: I've no idea how he'll ever go back to playschool after so much time at home with us. How's the rest of the crew?

Daidí: Grand, they're asleep. It's hard going trying to keep them entertained and trying to make the same place different. I hate the days when he cries like that.

Mamaí: Yeah but sure what else can I do? I'll be off for a couple of days now so hopefully that'll settle things down a bit.

Daidí: How was work?

Mamaí: Ah, grand. Totally fed up of this shite now. I mean, work's grand but it's hard not knowing where the end line is. How long will it be like this for? When will I see my new nephew? When will I have something to look forward to again? When can we go back to normal?

Daidí: We will have lots to look forward to.....

Mamaí: When will the kids go back to school? It's more than the academics it's the socialisation,

school tours, sports day. All the nice, fun things in life are cancelled!

Daidí: I know but look on the bright side; we're spending so much time with the kids that we would never have had only for this.

Mamáí: Yeah, but I miss my life. I feel like it has been taken over. We are living under oppression but not of an army or dictator but of a virus. I know why we're doing it but it doesn't mean I'm happy about it. Another 3 weeks of this and then what?

Daidí: Well, all we can do is our best and take it day by day and just think of how lucky we are to be healthy and still have our jobs and that we can get outside most days with the good weather. Imagine this in January!

Mamáí: I know, I know. I see the sick people and the stress on families and colleagues but it is still pure shite living like this. HUUUGGGGH. Sure all I can do is have a good aul moan about it and hope I'm a bit more joyful tomorrow with the sunshine.

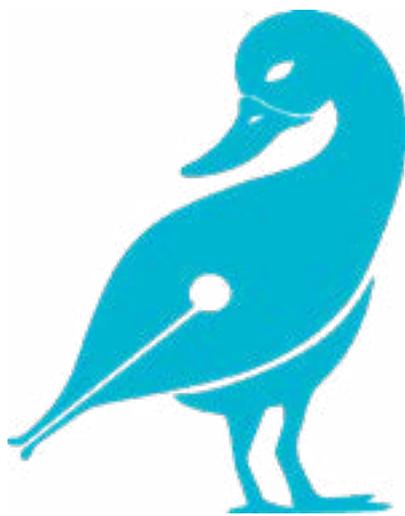
Rosa Devine, Siobhan Dignan, Alan Gilsonan, Emmy Lugoye, Fearghas MacLochlainn, Romy McKeever, Marie Stamp, Lucy Taylor and Imran Nasrudin.

We would also like to extend our thanks to all of the frontline workers and their families on the island of Ireland.

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FIGHTING
W O R D S



FIGHTING
W O R D S

NI

The Write To Right