

# “We’re in this together”

## REFLECTIONS

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*Doctors at the start of their careers are now facing the biggest medical crisis of the century. Natalie Farmer, a Foundation Year One Doctor and Research Editor at The BSDJ, shares how her team is finding hope in difficult times.*

It’s funny how so much can change in such a short space of time.

This time last year, I lived in a completely different city. Woke up, went to placement at the hospital, got home, revised, repeated. I was mentally exhausted, permanently grumpy, and desperately missed my loved ones who lived more than 120 miles away.

Now, I would give anything to go back to those bleak times. At least jumping on a train was an option, no matter how inconvenient it seemed at the time.

I started working as a junior doctor in August last year. It’s tough at the best of times, but at the moment feels impossible. A global pandemic was never something that I envisioned happening at any point during my medical career – especially not in my FY1 year, when I’m still learning the basics. I am constantly being exposed to high risk patients, all of which tend to be very unwell, given that I work in geriatric medicine. As a junior, I can’t help but feel hopeless, like anything that I do will make absolutely no difference to the outcome.

Of course, ‘curing’ a patient is not always possible or the right thing to do. One thing that I have learned from treating the elderly population is that sometimes, making someone comfortable is the kindest act of all. Holding someone’s hand could be preferable to antibiotics. A nasal cannula is less fear-inducing than a non-rebreathe mask.

COVID-19 has forced all of this to the forefront of the frontline. DNACPR forms are rife, with a patient’s swab status being the first question asked at handover. There’s an expectation that the NHS will not be able to withstand the immense pressures being piled on its shoulders. It all sounds very grim.

But actually – it’s not.

The claps I hear every Thursday tell me that it’s not, as do the unbelievably supportive messages from my friends and family. The number of kind gestures from both large and small businesses tells me that there’s still hope. The way that the country is pulling together to support the NHS says more than any statistic ever could.

There’s no doubt that work for healthcare professionals has changed over these past weeks, but not necessarily for the worst. There’s a sense of camaraderie like never before and I feel like part of a big, dysfunctional family.

To all the final year medical students coming to join us: welcome. As scary as it seems, everyone within the NHS is so grateful for you and you will all fit in within no time. Before you start, brush up on your history-taking and ABCDE assessments. But also remember that we’re all here to help if ever you need it. You are not alone.

We’re coping. We can do this. We’re in it together.

*This was first published on 16 April 2020 as part of the ‘Coronavirus: Stories from the Frontline’ blog, an online series run by The British Student Doctor Journal. Throughout the pandemic we shared the stories of healthcare workers and students tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. You can find the full series on our website: [www.bdsj.org.uk/covid19](http://www.bdsj.org.uk/covid19)*



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