

The NHS has withstood many emergency situations. It will withstand this one, but this crisis is different.



The NHS has not had to contend with a pandemic of this magnitude before and it is learning, but doing okay, *writes* **Revd Mia Kyte Hilborn**, *Chaplaincy Team Leader for* *Guy's and St Thomas's NHS Foundation Trust*.

It is an incredible place to work in such times; people really matter and no more so than in a hospital where there are COVID-19 patients. This is not so much an acute major incident, but rather that the whole country is working on a chronic critical timescale.

The outpouring of gratitude from the public has left many doctors, nurses, therapists and paramedics choked. There have been toilet rolls, tandooris, leeks and potatoes, which have appeared at the hospital, and hard-working cleaners and clinical staff have been delighted to receive such gifts. Taxis and hotels have offered help, car parks are free and even the congestion charge is suspended.

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Visiting on wards takes longer due to the personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand-washing that is essential before and after ministering to a patient, and due to increasing numbers of staff wanting support. Our chaplaincy team meets two or three times a day to learn about updates, to brief those taking over, to make sure no one has been forgotten, and to support each other through these draining days. The breaks mean we don't work at 110 per cent, and ensure we have enough in reserves for the days when work is manic.

Chaplains are continuing to do the work they are called to do, albeit they are finding new ways to do it. Anointing via cotton buds, tele-chaplaining and no touching. It is hard to have a quiet supportive chat when you have to stand 2 metres apart, but it can be made to work. It is very weird though roads are quiet, helicopters whirr overhead, soldiers are regularly seen and lots of people working from home.

There are many sad times, and the resilience needed is high. Well-being zones are being set up all over the country, staff support is essential, so that they can care for the very sick patients. Here, chaplains say daily prayers for the sick and the dying, remembering the staff who are caring for those patients, and we stand in place of the relatives who cannot come in. We light a candle, stand for a minute's silence, we say a psalm, usually 23 or 121, we pray and we say the Lord's Prayer. And I think it is very right we are here.

Fr Mychal Judge OFM was a Catholic priest and New York Fire Dept chaplain who died on 9.11. His prayer seems apt during the COVID-19 crisis:

*Lord, take me where You want me to go*

*Let me meet who You want me to meet*

*Tell me what You want me to say*

*And keep me out of Your way.*

*Amen.*

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