

## **A year in the life of a nurse**

When I offered to write this blog about what the last 12 months has meant to me, I didn't realise how emotional it would be. As many of you know I am a very proud NHS nurse with many years' service and it is a job that I love and I could not imagine doing anything else. Never anywhere in my wildest dreams did I imagine that a pandemic would hit us and little did I know what would be expected of me and my colleagues. It has without a doubt been the toughest experience of my career and you know what kept me going other than family and friends?? Running!! And I honestly mean that from the bottom of my heart, I am not just saying that for the purpose of this blog. So with all that in mind, I will tell you all what my experience has been like.

I remember watching the outbreak of Covid-19 unfold before us on the news but not really ever imagining the total disruption and devastation it would cause. I recall being on a night shift and hearing the rumours that we had cases in my hospital and that we had had our very first death on one of the infectious diseases wards. One of the night managers came to speak to us and told us that the rumours were correct and that someone had indeed died from Covid and we were told at that point to not tell anyone so as to not cause panic. Little did we know that was merely the tip of the iceberg. I still wasn't too worried, naively thinking my very competent infectious diseases colleagues would keep us all safe because all the Covid patients would just be admitted there. Within the next couple of weeks, the pandemic had taken hold of the world and all of a sudden it became very real. Myself and my colleagues were all disbanded around the hospital wherever we were required, most of them went to ICU. I was sent to help manage a Covid-positive ward, a ward where patients were admitted because no other treatments could be offered as they wouldn't do well on the ventilators or cope with being 'proned' (this is where the patients lay on their front for hours on end to give their damaged lungs a rest).

For the first time, I was very frightened. The death rate on this ward was very high, we lost 4 or 5 patients every single day and as relatives could not visit, I held more hands of dying patients in the 4 months I was there than I have in my whole career. Then alongside this, Stewart's renal function had seriously declined and he was now one of the 'clinically and extremely vulnerable' people in society. He was advised that if he wanted to stay well, survive even, then shielding was what he had to do. The fear I had of bringing Covid home with me and passing it onto my family was immense. It was an awful position to be in. I wanted to do my part as a nurse, I had a wealth of skills and experience to offer but I also wanted to protect my family. It felt that I had nowhere to go that felt safe. My lovely little home that was usually my sanctuary became the place I worried and cried.

So, in the midst of all the madness, my passion for running well and truly took a hold. I was always the kid at school that hated anything to do with running. I dreaded athletics and

always feigned illness, forgot my kit or forged my mum's signature to get out of it but shhhh don't tell her that!!

Then I did something I always said I wouldn't do, I signed up for my first marathon. That's right, the girl that could barely run for a bus a few years ago had convinced herself she could run 26.2 miles around Manchester. My marathon training had started prior to the pandemic and with the help and support of Stewart and the long weekend runs with Janet, my running hit another level. All was going well and on one particular cold and wet Saturday morning, I managed a 20-mile run in a pretty decent time. I was so proud of myself and so thankful to Janet for getting me round and listening to every moan and complaint along the way. I was truly devastated when I realised the Manchester Marathon could not go ahead. I felt all my training and hard work had been for nothing. From that moment, I decided that I wasn't giving up that easily and I would continue to run so that when I could eventually take part in my first marathon, I would enjoy every minute of it (well almost every minute).

I honestly can't express how much running has helped me over the last 15 months. Running was the thing I did to lose myself and it gave me the opportunity to reflect on the tough days at work and to process what was happening around us. I looked forward to the days I could run with a friend or my sister and daughter, these people kept me going. We had some really fun times whilst pounding the pavements and these became my therapy sessions. We did virtual races and challenges to give us something to work towards - who doesn't like a bit of race bling?

So now things are a lot better, life has resumed some normality and whilst work has a little way to go yet, we are getting there. I am now back on my own ward in my role as ward sister and I am so proud of all my amazing colleagues and how we all came together through such a difficult time. As for running, I still love it - and why sign up for one marathon when you can run 2! So Manchester and Snowdonia here I come. October will make for an interesting month that's for sure :0)

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