

NHS Ayrshire & Arran

Meeting:	Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board
Meeting date:	Monday 1 February 2021
Title:	Patient Experience: A COVID-19 Experience
Responsible Director:	Joanne Edwards, Director of Acute Services
Report Author:	Laura Harvey, QI Lead, Patient Experience

1. Purpose

This is presented to the Board for:

- Awareness

This paper relates to:

- Government policy/directive
- Local policy

This aligns to the following NHSScotland quality ambition(s):

- Safe
- Effective
- Person Centred

2. Report summary

2.1 Situation

This story outlines a patient's experience of being hospitalised with COVID-19.

2.2 Background

The story highlights the impact staff have on a patient's experience and that this is especially important when visiting is restricted to essential visits only, in line with the Scottish Government's Strategic Framework. This patient described how the staff became her surrogate family in the absence of visits from her loved ones.

2.3 Assessment

This story demonstrates the importance of clear, kind and compassionate communication during these difficult times. As patients are unable to have regular visits, their reliance on staff increases and whilst the use of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) can sometimes act as a barrier to effective communication, this story highlights the huge positive impact when we get it right.

Sharing this with staff who continue to provide care in difficult circumstances will help boost morale and reinforce to staff the importance of effective communication.

2.3.1 Quality/patient care

In this case, the care received was excellent and the patient is very grateful for all that staff did to make her well. She appreciates she was lucky to avoid admission to Intensive Therapy Unit (ITU) and that was due to the excellent and efficient care she received from all staff during her stay.

2.3.2 Workforce

This story highlights that every part of our workforce plays a role in the patient's experience

2.3.3 Financial

No financial impact

2.3.4 Risk assessment/management

No identified risk

2.3.5 Equality and diversity, including health inequalities

An impact assessment is not required as the individual sharing the story has given consent and any impact on others will be individual.

2.3.6 Other impact

- Best value - Demonstrates good use of resources to achieve safest patient outcome
- Safe, Caring & Respectful - This story fully complies with our corporate objectives and highlights the importance of applying them to every patient or loved one conversation.

2.3.7 Communication, involvement, engagement and consultation

This patient story will be shared across acute services to highlight this patient's positive experience

2.3.8 Route to the meeting

This story has not been heard at any other meetings

2.4 Recommendation

For awareness. Members are asked to read this story for their information.

3. List of appendices

Appendix 1 - Patient Experience: A COVID-19 Experience – Written reflection

Patient Story

“Jane’s” COVID-19 experience

Please note “Jane” has opted to remain anonymous but is happy for her story to be shared with her deepest gratitude to all NHS staff who are the real champions of this pandemic.

My name is Jane, I’m a 62 year old married woman, mother of 2 and grandmother of one and another on the way. I am blessed to have a strong, supportive and loving family and, up until COVID-19 arrived, I have enjoyed relatively good health and have not been a hospital inpatient for over 10 years, when I was admitted after a rather nasty asthma attack. I was diagnosed with Asthma when I was 30 and to be honest, it hasn’t bothered me much and aside from a daily inhaler, I never really have to worry about it.

When the UK decided to lockdown as the spread of COVID-19 increased significantly across all areas of the UK, my husband and I were keen to abide by the guidance and stay at home as much as possible. My daughter had offered to do our food shopping so we really didn’t have to go outside for anything. Whilst I didn’t feel that shielding wasn’t necessary for myself, my husband had a number of medical conditions that put him at high risk and I would never forgive myself if he caught COVID-19 as a result of me gallivanting!

So, we made it through March and almost to the end of April without any problems. By this point my daughter was pregnant and I felt it wasn’t fair for her to keep putting herself at risk and that I would do our shopping via click and collect. This worked fine the first couple of times but on the third occasion, I couldn’t get a slot for five days so I decided to go early morning to get my shopping. If only I knew then the impact this decision would have!

At the supermarket I did everything I could to minimise the risk – hand sanitizing, cleaning down the trolley and maintaining social distancing. Whilst I did all I could, I was surprised at the number of people without masks and who had no qualms about brushing against people to reach items on the shelves, rather than waiting until the person moved away. But I did my shopping as quickly and safely as possible and was in and out the supermarket in a matter of 30 mins.

Approximately ten days later I started to feel a little unwell – I had a headache and my chest felt a little tight but not enough to give me any concern. I didn’t have any of the symptoms of COVID-19. I took paracetamol and my Ventolin inhaler and both worked and I felt better the rest of the day.

The next morning, I awoke at 5am unable to breathe – my chest was really tight and I felt awful. I used my inhaler repeatedly and it didn’t make any difference. I could barely finish a sentence without getting too breathless to talk. My husband panicked and dialled 999 much to my annoyance – I didn’t need to bother them!

The paramedics arrived within 20 mins. As they walked into the house I was alarmed at their appearance. They had on full protective clothing including masks, goggles and face shields. However, they soon put myself and my husband at ease when they introduced themselves in a friendly and kind manner. They explained their outfits were a precaution and what they had to wear at every call out. They talked about how hot and uncomfortable they were but also how necessary they were. One of the paramedics told me he had a wife and young children at home so he was staying at a colleague's house at the moment to minimise the risk to his family.

When I reflected on this later, it really struck me how much some of our frontline staff had to sacrifice in order to serve the public. Clapping on a Thursday evening just didn't feel enough!

When the paramedic took my vital signs he was concerned. My heartrate was up and my oxygen levels were really low. He said he could see how much work I was having to do to breathe and that the safest thing to do was to take me to the hospital to get checked out thoroughly.

At first, I objected and said the staff were busy enough without having to see me and the paramedic reassured me that actually, the hospital was relatively quiet and given my current symptoms, I was taking a big risk if I didn't go to get checked out so I reluctantly agreed.

The process of getting me in from the ambulance and quickly assessed was seamless and before I knew it I was in the Combined Assessment Unit, and again, staff in full PPE came to take my vital signs and to carry out a COVID-19 test which was necessary for all admissions with respiratory symptoms. This was all done efficiently and the nurse chatted away pleasantly to me throughout which really helped put me at ease. The nurse explained what would happen next and as my oxygen levels were so low, she started me on oxygen via a face mask.

I was placed into a single room to await review by the doctor. At this point, I had started to feel hot and flushed but I thought that was probably down to my shortness of breath and increased effort breathing. It still hadn't crossed my mind that I may have coronavirus as I had taken all the necessary precautions to avoid it.

The doctor arrived within 30 minutes, also in PPE. She introduced herself and carried out a thorough assessment. She asked me if I had been out much or in contact with other people. I advised her that I hadn't and that my husband and I have taken every precaution necessary to keep us safe. She told me she was worried I may have COVID and that was when I remembered my solitary trip to the supermarket. Surely not! I hadn't left my home in almost three months and on the one occasion I do I contract coronavirus? Surely my luck wasn't that bad? The doctor advised the results would be through within 24 hours and that in the meantime, I was to continue on oxygen, nebulisers and also a magnesium infusion which was all aimed at treating my asthma and depending on my covid result, I may have to start antibiotics.

For the next 12 hours, I think I must have slept on and off for most of the day. Every time I woke up, my chest was as tight as a drum and the monitor I was attached to would be beeping madly! The nurse would then come in, adjust the monitor and on some occasions, they had to increase my oxygen. My breathing was taking so much effort I was exhausted and the nurses decided I should be catheterised as a single trip to the toilet had been torturous and my breathing had been really difficult whilst trying to mobilise.

My daughter and son were keeping in contact with me via text message and I had called my husband to let him know how I was. It was difficult for them not being able to visit but to be honest, at this stage I just wanted to sleep so was glad no one could visit at this point.

I'm not sure how much time had passed when I was informed that my COVID test had come back positive and that I would be getting transferred to a ward for my ongoing treatment and observation. Within a couple of hours I found myself on my way to the ward – the corridors of the hospital seemed really quiet and a bit eerie.

Arriving in the ward I was greeted by two lovely members of nursing staff and escorted into another side room. The staff informed me of the plans and also orientated me to the room and the call button was put within my reach and a jug of fresh iced water was brought in for me. If it wasn't for the fact I felt horrible, it was like booking into a hotel! The staff were so kind and helpful and they all had their names and job title written onto their PPE so it was relatively easy to know who everyone was.

At this point, little did I know that I would remain in the ward for a further 12 days, during which I was on increasing amounts of oxygen and also was reviewed by a member of the Intensive Care Team. There was also conversations about transferring me to HDU but thankfully at this stage, staff felt like I was turning a corner and that it was safe for me to stay within the ward.

During these 12 days, the hospital staff became my everything – my surrogate family. For the first nine days they had to help me with everything, from doing the toilet to getting washed and dressed, to helping me mobilise around my room to build me back up. At all times, I was treated with kindness and compassion and nothing was too much trouble. They helped me use Zoom to be able to speak to all my family together as without a shadow of a doubt, not being able to see my family whilst I was in hospital was the hardest part of the experience - even worse than the nippy sore blood which is taken quite frequently to measure the oxygen in my blood!

Despite the regular calls, texts and zoom calls, not being able to see my loved ones in the flesh was difficult and if my husband didn't answer his phone when I called I panicked, imagining something was wrong and at times I got myself quite worked up. On these occasions, the staff were great and often managed to talk me down and help me contact him again or speak to my son or daughter who could reassure me all was well.

One of the most difficult parts of the whole experience was the lack of touch. The PPE staff wore served as a physical barrier and it did seem to affect the “human” aspect of my experience. Staff were great but obviously to maintain safety, they only approached me when necessary and I had no idea how much I would miss a gentle hand on mine or a gentle touch to my shoulder. Social Distancing is a strange moniker for something that is so anti-social and against our normal compassionate approach to others

As my condition improved, I was finally able to acknowledge just how sick I had been and to recognise that it was thanks to the excellent care and treatment I received from all the staff, including the paramedics that responded to my husband’s initial call. However, my full patient experience was down to more than just clinical staff – every porter and domestic also added to my positive experience and I will never be able to say a big enough thank you for the sacrifices many staff have no doubt had to make in order to care for other people’s loved ones.

I am now at home and none the worse for my COVID experience. Thankfully I don’t appear to have any of the symptoms of long COVID and for that I am thankful. I hope my story serves to remind people of how easy it can be to contract COVID-19 – my own single trip to the supermarket was all that was needed for me to get it. It could have been due to someone getting too close to me, or on an item I picked up – I will never know but it does go to show even people who rigidly strict to the guidance can still contract this horrible virus. The doctor who discharged me told me how very lucky I had been as he was sure that by day five, he really thought I was going to need more support for my breathing and that if I did require ITU, wasn’t sure if I would have gotten back out. Quite a sobering thought!

So, in many ways, I feel like I owe my life to my local NHS Heroes. Never forget how special a job you do every day – whether you’re in an office dictating a doctor’s letter, at a patient’s bedside helping them get washed, or sitting in the boardroom – every single person makes our NHS what it is and I for one will always appreciate and treasure each and every one of you.