



**Turn on the TV, read a newspaper or look at social media platforms and a message you are guaranteed to see is that we should all Stay at Home to Stay Safe.**

**You may well be fed up of hearing this but the importance of this simple message cannot be overstated.**

**The following article, written exclusively for Forward Mid, paints a picture of the reality of the challenges currently faced by frontline NHS staff during this current crisis.**



# A day in the life of a ICU nurse. The Coronavirus story

Meet Nicola, a staff nurse with over 27 years working in the NHS.

Nicola has worked in the intensive care unit for over 9 years now and the Coronavirus is one of the not known viruses she has ever seen.

We are putting Nicola's personal story to share with the community. The amazing job Nicola and the rest of the NHS staff do and also a big thank you to everyone that works in ICU and who are on the front line, putting their lives second to care for the really sick patients that are unable to stay at home and fight this.

Hello, my name is Nicola. I'm your average 46 year old woman. Married with two children and a dog. I also happen to be a nurse working in the intensive care unit at the royal infirmary Edinburgh.

My unit is a place that I truly hope the majority of you will never have to experience. It exists as a last attempt to save lives. It is where people who are extremely sick need to go on to a ventilator to help breathe, on a dialysis machine to keep kidneys functioning. All of this as a person goes through multi organ failure. They are given numerous drugs to keep patients alive:-

- Sedatives
- Antibiotics
- Neurotransmitters
- Analgesic
- Diuretics, the list is endless.

It's a place where we as nurses and doctors do everything in our power to keep patients alive, but also where we can allow for a dignified death when nothing else can be done for the patients and time for family to say their 'goodbyes.'

It's a place that will take 6 months to feel comfortable with a ventilator and 2 years to feel competent with everything else we have to handle on a shift.

It's my second home. It's where my work family live. It's where a dark sense of humour exists to get us through a particular hard shift. We laugh and cry together because only your work family truly understands the true emotional, mental, physical and psychological



demands placed upon as a critical care nurse. It is where I feel safe in the knowledge that:-

- I know what I'm doing,
- I do my job well,
- My work family have my back, and I do for them. We are a team.

BUT my safe place is under threat, my work family are at serious risk. My home family are worried and anxious about my safety and I'm truly terrified for theirs.

The cause of this fear... An illness named Covid19 caused by a virus that is sweeping across the nation and our world. It is taking lives unceremoniously, swiftly and indiscriminately. It has no rules. It's only aim to destroy lives.

Here in ICU we are ready to fight for the lives of our patients. Our theatre blues uniform is now covered with long arm theatre gowns. Wrapped completely around us down to our feet. Double gloves, tight face masks which are very tight, hair nets and visors. We enter the unit the only way we can via a zipped doorway into the ante chamber. As the door is zipped behind us, the door in front is unzipped. We can now enter our bubble.

On the surface the unit looks the same as it always does - patients, medical equipment, emergency trolleys, monitors, alarms, flashing lights and staff (lots of staff). There is absence of the usual noise. No visitors, researchers, X-ray technicians, domestics all the normal foot fall of a busy acute unit has gone. It doesn't feel the same there's a surreal feeling, an air of expectancy, anticipation, fear, anxiety and nervous tension.

My work family have now become clones with names penned over their chest, only eyes visible and voice muffled, we are hot, the masks are claustrophobic, we cannot breathe in or feel fresh air.

And so our shift commences someone said "Angels dressed as spacemen." Now things are the same - Every patient will receive care second to none. No questions asked. A holding of hands, the reassurance of words, the presence of someone who cares, not because it's our job but because we are fundamentally ordinary people who have our own loved ones and we would not want them to suffer alone nor would we see someone else suffer alone.

These are strange times fighting an unknown virus but **we are all using our skills and experience to fight it.**

My work family make me proud to call myself one of them, and I am proud to call myself a nurse.

I give my all to the whole shift. I will go home tired and weary but I will be there tomorrow to do it all again. Whilst I continue my part in this story.

**Please do your part and stay home. Stay safe and be with your loved ones.**

## A message from NHS Inform

### Social distancing?

Social distancing measures are steps everyone should take to reduce the social interaction between people. This will help reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).



They are:

- **Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) - these symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough**
- **Stay at home and only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you can't work from home)**
- **Only take one form of exercise a day, for example a run, walk or cycle alone or with members of your household**
- **Stay 2 metres (6 feet) away from other people at all times If you go out**
- **Wash your hands as soon as you get home**
- **Do not meet others, even friends or family - if parents don't live together, children under 18 can be moved between their parents' homes as long as no-one in either household has symptoms**
- **Avoid non-essential use of public transport - when possible, alter your travel times to avoid rush hour**
- **Work from home, where possible - your employer should support you to do this**
- **Avoid gatherings with friends and family - keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media**
- **Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services**

The BBC have uploaded some video to help people visualise what it is like to work in a NHS hospital during this virus [www.bbc.com/news/av/health-52190961/coronavirus-inside-an-icu-fighting-covid-19](http://www.bbc.com/news/av/health-52190961/coronavirus-inside-an-icu-fighting-covid-19)

Stay home and help to break the transmission of the coronavirus (COVID-19).