

Inspiring Stories

In times of crisis, who steps up to the plate?

History is littered with examples of how, during times of crisis, accepted conventions are set aside and people pull together. This often entails them doing jobs or tasks that hitherto they may not have considered.

This can apply to individual situations, or on a broader scale, such as whole countries.

It never ceases to amaze me how little comment there is on the post-war success of Japan and Germany. These two countries were crushed and defeated. Whole cities were razed to the ground by bombing, industries destroyed and countless people killed or injured.

So why did they emerge as two of the most prosperous countries on the planet?

The reason is straightforward. Vested interests were set aside and people pulled together. There was a common aim and a realisation that, unless there was a whole team approach, progress and rebuilding would not be achieved.

This brings me to Covid. The pandemic had the potential to bring the health service to its knees. But it was not government policy that held the NHS together, it was the staff.

There are countless examples of people working in ways that were un-envisaged, and adjusting fundamentally their way of life.

Many nurses with young children moved out of their homes and lived in staff residences, for fear of bringing the virus back and infecting their families. For many, this lasted several months. There are further examples, such as the staff of nursing homes pitching

tents in the grounds and camping out, thus ensuring the elderly residents were not left with insufficient staff.

During the first wave of Covid, elective surgery all but ceased across the NHS. As a result, surgeons were left unoccupied. Across the country, there are copious examples of surgeons and other medical staff working as nursing assistants on Intensive Care Units.

Nurses had to teach surgeons a whole range of skills, such as four-hourly turning of patients; feeding via a naso-gastric tube; how to look after the ventilator and endotracheal tube. Medical staff were taking blood gases, drawing up fentanyl, and other tasks that would not normally be expected of them.

This commitment has been maintained throughout the pandemic, and is an example to us all that, during times of crisis, the best can be brought out in people.

Extreme / Disaster Nursing has all of these hallmarks. Nurses working in less than ideal conditions achieve so much by not sticking with the usual professional boundaries, and whilst they have to work within their sphere of competence, they expand their knowledge and make a huge impact on the people they treat and care for.

So let's not lose the 'can do' attitude post-pandemic. Of course, surgeons and others will go back to their day jobs, but hopefully the increased team-working spirit will sustain long into the future.

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