

Kathryn Lewis, Region Development Officer, and member of SI Nantwich & District has sent in this piece about what it's like for her working on the frontline. Katherine manages NHS Hearing Services across South Manchester



When the restrictions set in we had to close all outpatient clinics and have some training for redeployment. We had to keep some of the service still functioning as hearing aids need batteries and repairs. We have a system for postal batteries and repairs and we leave a box with slips to fill in for our patients to drop off and collect hearing aids. The only people we are still carrying out hearing assessments for are those who are about to commence on cancer treatments.

PPE was an issue for us but we have now started to have some come through. We also started to think of different ways we could still connect with patients. We had been using Skype to help patients with rehabilitation for tinnitus and balance problems so have been looking at more secure platforms to carry out virtual clinics. We have been telephoning many of those who had or were waiting for appointments before we had to close the doors. Have now started to programme hearing aids and post them out with lots of written advice and then following up to see if they are managing ok. This is still a developing part of the service and something we can continue afterwards.

We had training to work on wards to help with feeding and general care but as yet have not been called as the hospitals are coping. I have been redeployed for 2 days a week in a command centre for the Trust. This entails pulling together all the information daily on the number of patients in wards, those who have and don't have Covid19. We look at the sad issues such as number of deaths and mortuary capacity- this is to ensure that we raise issues and move things around if needed. There are 2 reports a day that go to the Executive teams. We also report any PPE or drug problems.

It has been interesting and very challenging and has given me a wider scope of what is happening. Thankfully the Nightingale hospital has not had to be extensively used. This is because by people ensuring isolation or restrictions the hospitals have been able to cope. The other days I do my 'normal' job although it doesn't feel quite the same.

We all know that we will be returning to a slightly different type of service and this has been the time to think outside of what we do normally and challenge ourselves to see if we can improve some things. I am working on a strategy for gradually introducing some face to face appointments. The difficulties have been not seeing all the team (I've kept some home working, especially those with young children and those at risk). We have 2 What's App groups to keep in touch and update everyone. It's working very well. My team go through emotional ups and downs and obviously with the uncertainty, we do not know what is still ahead; the team support helps everyone with this.

Kathryn Lewis