

# Delivering community care during coronavirus – Part I

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***As part of our series looking at how the NHS has continued to offer care across a wide range of settings during coronavirus we caught up with Community Physiotherapist, Becky Mead to find out if coronavirus has affected the way she has delivered her role.***

“Imagine you have a £1 of energy to spend in a day. Do you really want to use 80 pence worth in the morning?” Community Physiotherapist, Becky Mead, often poses this question to focus the minds of patients who are recovering from a viral infection and suffering with severe fatigue, but the question is perhaps a useful reminder to us all during these challenging times.

Becky grew up in Derbyshire and joined the NHS in 2016 as a Rotational Physiotherapist following her training at the University of Nottingham. Before coronavirus became the main concern of the NHS Becky was looking forward to joining the Neurological Outpatients Rehab Team at Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust (DCHS). However, following the commencement of a nationwide lockdown on Monday 23 March, Becky was asked to continue in her current role as a community therapist.

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“When coronavirus arrived our main difficulty was not knowing much about it or how long it would be here for. We knew we were going to be very busy and much of our focus in the beginning was supporting local hospitals as they worked to discharge as many patients as they safely could to try and make space on the wards for potential coronavirus patients.”

Prior to coronavirus Becky would see on average six patients a day and everything was face-to-face. The advent of coronavirus meant that some things had to change for Becky. “Physio, as you can imagine, usually involves very close contact with a patient so we had to think about how we

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***“Physio, as you can imagine, usually involves very close contact with a patient so we had to think about how we could do things differently where possible.”***

could do things differently where possible. I’m now quite adept at assessing a patient through a window!” Wearing PPE for all patients was one of the first and biggest changes. “Many of our patients are hard of hearing and so sometimes it was difficult to communicate effectively but safety is the most important consideration so a necessary trade off.” The sunniest spring on record has also been a help to Becky as it has allowed her to support lots of patients in their garden, though commented that “wearing full PPE in the sun can be quite sweaty.”

Other changes have seen Becky carry out more reviews by telephone and her use of video to help with assessments has increased. “Family members have always had an important role to play when it comes to assessing a patient and understanding how they are feeling, but the advent of coronavirus saw this importance grow as family members took more video footage of the patient to help with assessments.”



Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. Becky comments that the main issues of recovery for coronavirus are loss of strength and function. “Patients fatigue and become breathless a lot quicker than they did before.”

Becky has supported two patients to recover from coronavirus. Both had had 3-4 week stays in Intensive Treatment Unit (ITU) on a ventilator. “They were both managing well at home. They didn’t need equipment to help their recovery, just advice. People lose a lot of muscle mass in ITU and so I gave them advice on how to improve strength and endurance.”

***“One of my patient’s neighbours now thinks he is bionic!”***

Goal setting is an important part of any patient’s recovery and one of Becky’s coronavirus patients had set themselves the goal of being strong enough to walk to their gate on a Thursday evening to take part in the 8pm clap to show their appreciation for those that had cared for him and for all those who are out there making an unbelievable difference to our lives in these times. “He did it. And then he was out there for VE day. One of his neighbours now thinks he is bionic!”

Albert Einstein is known to have said that “in the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity.” Reflecting on the last couple of months, Becky thinks that some of the changes she has had to make in her role will continue into the future. “I’ll definitely carry on doing more telephone and video reviews as this allows me to be more flexible with the patient. With a video I can go back

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## **Delivering community care during coronavirus – Part I (continued)**

and review one movement several times if needed. I think we'll triage patients more in the first instance to get a better understanding of their needs before we initiate a visit." After a pause, Becky adds, "I hope coronavirus helps to put therapy on the map. The media focused so much on the work of nurses and doctors but a patient's treatment is comprised of a lot of different people – too many to mention in fact – so it would be great to think people know a little more than they did about the role we play as therapists in supporting people to recover."

***"I guess if you're going to be in lockdown there are a lot worse places to be than the Peak District!"***



When Becky hasn't been at work she has been taking advantage of the fine weather and been out on her bike when she can. "I guess if you're going to be in lockdown there are a lot worse places to be than the Peak District!"

***Part II will see us catch up with Advanced Support Worker, Lisa Bufton.***