

## Redeployed in the Swabbing Team

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My name is Kim, I am a Health Visitor and have been redeployed into the swabbing team. My role as a health visitor stopped abruptly when the coronavirus pandemic hit the UK. There were approx. 50% of the team that were told they were going to be redeployed to help on the frontline. I was not given much notice about where I was going and expected to be sent to a ward to help out as best I could. I was surprised to have a phonecall from my manager to say I was going to be joining the swabbing team and the (1 hour) training was going to be the next day and I was starting work at the weekend.

South East Ambulance Service were employed by Public Health England (PHE) to carry out the swabbing and so myself and 15 nurses set up the team to cover Surrey and Sussex to work 7 days a week. There was one nurse working from Tangmere, one from Durrington and two from Brighton daily. The shifts were 8am-8pm.

Our role began with swabbing Key Workers. We would get our work from PHE in the morning and then set off in the Ambulance with a paramedic. I remember being nervous on my first shift but soon realised that everyone was in the same boat, unprecedented circumstances with no real rule book to refer to. I swabbed nurses, Dr's, went to Prisons and Police stations, swabbed vicars and bus drivers and everyone who was at the time being told to carry on working to keep the country going.



We travelled all over the County, to places I have never been to before, to villages and towns that I did not know existed. Everywhere we went we were waved at and the smiles and appreciation from the general public was tangible. It was hard to go anywhere without being given free coffee and sandwiches by shops and garages and pushed to the front of the queue...something that I am not used to and felt a little uncomfortable about.

After a few weeks we were told to move into the care homes and start swabbing the residents. This was a sad time. The true horror and anxiety of what Covid could do in the care homes was very real. Very elderly and vulnerable residents who had not left their rooms in weeks, day rooms closed off, no relatives allowed to visit, -solitary confinement at a time in your life when you need human to human contact the most. Can you imagine how an elderly person with dementia felt when someone in a white hazmat suit arrived in their room to perform what is a very unpleasant procedure? We saw many tired and worn out carers who were doing their very best with inadequate PPE and low on basic stocks.

I worked Bank Holiday VE day. There were flags and well wishers everywhere. When my crew mate and I came out of a care home there was a £10 under the Ambulance wiper with a note of thanks from someone. I am hoping over this whole time that the NHS's worth is appreciated. We are the luckiest nation in the World to have such a service and I feel it is sometimes taken for granted and often doesn't get the financial recognition it needs after every Budget. For instance, it is just as important as Defence as needs to be on a par with it.

Working weekends again and missing my daughter's birthday as I was out for 14 hours was a challenge. Nevertheless the whole experience has been positive for me, I have felt I was doing some important frontline work and the people I met from all walks of life were appreciative and lovely: standing at St Richards Hospital in a line clapping with staff one warm Thursday evening ... a very emotional experience.