

Over 100 health and care workers have died from COVID-19 in the UK

Barry Mason
21 April 2020

At least 100 front-line health and social care workers have been killed by COVID-19 in the UK as of yesterday. Nursing Notes, which keeps an accurate record of all who have died in the field and announces total deaths each morning, wrote Monday afternoon, “The number of health and social care workers thought to have died from COVID-19 has now entered triple figures.”

This gruesome total is more than double the number of deaths recorded by the Conservative government, which only includes fatalities of those directly employed by the National Health Service (NHS). According to the Tories, only 40 health and social care workers had died as of Monday.

Among the many tragic deaths is that of Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong, a 28-year-old mother of a two-year old boy. The nurse, who was eight months pregnant, was diagnosed with COVID-19 on April 5. Two days later, she was admitted to hospital where her baby, a girl, was delivered by an emergency caesarean operation. Mary died on April 12 of COVID-19. Her baby has survived.

Mary’s husband is self-isolating and has been tested for COVID-19. Tragically, Mary’s father also died as a result of suspected COVID-19 at the end of March.

Mary came to England from Ghana with her father when she was a teenager. She trained as a nurse and had been working at Luton and Dunstable University hospital. A GoFundMe page opened to support her family has raised more than £120,000 to date.

Mary worked on a general ward at the hospital until her 28th week of pregnancy, finishing on March 12. She had worked at the hospital for five years and was working on ward 12 when she finished. Ward 12 is now a COVID-19 ward but not so when Mary was still working, according to hospital authorities.

Reporting on Mary’s death, *Channel 4 News* said it had been told by sources at the hospital that there had been a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), including gowns, as well as the rationing of masks, during the period Mary was working there. Hospital authorities have denied

there are any shortages.

Other UK health workers who have died from COVID-19 over the last two weeks include:

Gareth Roberts, a 65-year-old nurse, who had come out of retirement to help on the wards at Llandough hospital in Cardiff. He volunteered to do extra shifts because of the high demand. Gareth died on April 11. On April 14, a *Mail Online* article reported his family’s claim that he had to do the job without adequate PPE. They say he had only a “paper mask, plastic gloves and a pinny [apron].”

Dr. Peter Tun, aged 62, died in the intensive care unit at Reading hospital on April 13. He worked as an associate specialist in neurorehabilitation. His son, Michael, told the BBC that his father had complained to hospital management when they took away PPE from his department for use elsewhere in the hospital.

Josiane Zauma Ebonja Ekoli, an agency nurse, who died on April 13 in Leeds General Infirmary. The 55-year-old mother worked as a nurse for more than 30 years. She had worked on COVID-19 wards prior to her death. Her daughter told the *Guardian* that her mother had described the provision of PPE as “poor.”

Amor Padilla Gatinao was 50 when she died on April 10, and had worked as a nurse for 18 years at St. Charles hospital in West London. Her husband Mario, speaking to *Sky News*, said he thought she had caught the coronavirus while working at St. Charles. He explained that when she became ill, he had called an ambulance, but she was refused admittance to hospital. He told *Sky*, “I don’t know why the government did not do more to protect NHS workers, like my wife. She was neglected.”

Dr. Abdul Mabud Chowdhury, 53, died in Queens hospital in Romford on April 8 after being in hospital for two weeks. He worked as a consultant urologist at Homerton hospital in east London. In March, while he was working as a doctor, he had Facebook messaged UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson calling for PPE to be provided to front line staff as a matter of urgency and for the testing of health workers to be immediately actioned. He told Johnson that

health staff “are in direct contact with patients” and have a “human right like others to live in this world disease-free with our family and children.”

The lack of provision of PPE for front line health and care staff has become an international scandal. *The Lancet* medical journal wrote in a March 21 editorial, “As the pandemic accelerates, access to personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers is a key concern.

“Some medical staff are waiting for equipment while already seeing patients who may be infected or are supplied with equipment that might not meet requirements... Health-care systems globally could be operating at more than maximum capacity for many months... In the global response, the safety of health-care workers must be ensured.

“Adequate provision of PPE is just the first step; other practical measures must be considered, including cancelling non-essential events to prioritise resources; provision of food, rest, and family support; and psychological support. Presently, health-care workers are every country’s most valuable resource.”

A survey conducted by the Royal College of Nursing found that 50 percent of nursing staff felt under pressure to carry out procedures, even if the normal level of protection was not being provided. The survey showed half of the nurses working in high risk areas such as intensive care and high dependency units had been asked to reuse PPE equipment designed by manufacturers for single use only. For those treating COVID-19 patients in other areas the figure was nearly 40 percent.

To be safe, health workers treating COVID-19 patients should be using a full-face visor, an FFP3 respirator mask and a long-sleeved fluid repellent gown and gloves. However, many staff are using only protective goggles, basic face masks and short sleeve gowns.

According to the Department of Health, the UK is using 150,000 disposable gowns each day. Ministers reported 55,000 gowns had been delivered on April 17. A consignment of 400,000 gowns from Turkey was due to arrive April 19 but was delayed, prompting the government to send a Royal Air Force military transport jet to Turkey Monday to menacingly secure the shipment—with two further Royal Air Force aircraft set to follow over the next 24 hours.

Health workers’ fears about the lack of PPE spreading the disease were expressed this weekend by Dr. Rinesh Parmar, chairman of the Doctors’ Association UK. He told the *Sunday Times*, “Many doctors are in an impossible position and have reported the rationing of gowns and visors, with some having to wipe down items that would normally be for single use.

“There is an emerging concern and fear among doctors that the rationing of PPE in this way may inadvertently lead

to the spread of the infection to other patients, something we are desperate to avoid.”

The deaths of so many health and social care workers expose the long-term attack on health care facilities and resources that has taken place under successive Tory and Labour administrations. Between 2013 and 2016, the Tories, as they enforced savage austerity in order to pay for the bailout of the bankers, cut the value of the national stockpile of PPE by 40 percent.

A frontline nurse in the Red Zone at the Royal Bournemouth Hospital made the following remarks to the WSWS regarding the revelation of at least 100 health and social care worker deaths:

“News of the death of more than 100 health and social care workers of Covid-19 is scandalous and shocking. As a front-line nurse, I condemn this government in the strongest terms for their inability to provide proper PPE, testing and other facilities which would have prevented the deaths of these health workers. There is no doubt that these staff were the victims of the criminal policies of the government.

“My colleagues who have got Covid-19 symptoms are still struggling to have a swab test done and in some cases were denied admission to hospital until their symptoms got worse. We are not allowed to wear World Health Organisation recommended PPE when looking after patients with suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients in wards.

“Today, I learnt from a Royal College of Nursing survey that even in high-risk areas where aerosol generating procedures [medical procedures that can induce the production of airborne droplets of various sizes] are taking place, more than a quarter of colleagues across the UK do not have enough filtering face piece respirators (FFP3 or FFP2/N95) and fluid-repellent coveralls/gowns.

“A few days ago, I listened in anger at the government’s demand to wash and reuse the disposable PPE and [Health Secretary] Matt Hancock saying that there was no magic wand to have PPE fall from the sky. He did not say that when his government wasted nearly three months in facing the coronavirus outbreak and when much needed funds for PPE were slashed over the last few years, knowing that a world pandemic could happen. This government has a magic wand to bailing out financial markets, banks and big companies while giving a pittance for working people.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact