

# Volunteers are essential in Covid battle

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A clinician who is helping to lead the battle against Covid-19 at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge has praised a loyal team of volunteers saying: "We couldn't do it without them."

Urgent care programme lead, David Monk, says St John Ambulance volunteers have clocked up an incredible 4,000 hours between them since March, and played a vital role in the Emergency Department and the Urgent Treatment Centre.

Now St John has formally agreed to continue with its support until April next year, adding an important layer of extra resilience during the pandemic, and through the flu season.

The team of around 25 volunteers, aged 18 up, are all trained first aiders but undergo a dedicated two-day Covid course with St John before joining the hospital where they receive an induction covering aspects including infection control.

They work on a rota basis covering five shifts per 24 hour period, often doing stints of eight to ten hours. There is no clinical responsibility for patients, but they undertake a myriad of other essential tasks that would otherwise be done by busy staff.

That includes taking responsibility for PPE stock and ensuring the right equipment is in the right place at the right time. They work closely with the patient flow navigator (PFN) and the nurse in charge (NIC) and answer bleep requests, which usually relate to patient transfer to

X-ray, CT, MRI, or on to wards.

The volunteers, who regularly take 16000-20000 steps per shift, also help with the feeding of patients, distributing drinks, collecting items for patients, and keeping them company at a time when they may feel scared or lonely due to visiting restrictions.

In return they polish skills like communication and empathy and learn from teams working in a highly pressured and dynamic environment.

David, who was emergency department manager before moving into his current Covid-related role, said: “Everyone is agreed we couldn’t have got through the last few months without the volunteers. They have a can-do attitude and quickly became part of the team.

“To volunteer 4,000 hours since March is just incredible and some have found it so rewarding they have gone on to apply for hospital-related positions such as health care assistants.”

St John Ambulance national head of community response, Adam Williams, added: “I am incredibly proud of our people and the contribution we have made to fight against this pandemic. I am pleased we have been able to extend the partnership to a time when there will hopefully be less pressure on everyone.”

Volunteer Dita Lee, an advanced first aider (AFA) who travels from Cromer, said: “I put my name forward as the country’s fight against the pandemic was unfolding. It was one of the best decisions I have made and whatever happens in the future, I will always look back at 2020 as an incredible and transformational year.

“There is nothing more rewarding than creating a rapport with a patient and just being there for them, making them smile a little, helping them pass the time.”

Anyone interested in joining St John Ambulance can find more details at [www.sja.org.uk](http://www.sja.org.uk)



