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RADIO 4

TRANSCRIPT OF “FILE ON 4” – “CORONAVIRUS – STORIES FROM BEHIND THE MASK”

CURRENT AFFAIRS GROUP

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PRODUCER:	Paul Grant
EDITOR:	Carl Johnston

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THE ATTACHED TRANSCRIPT WAS TYPED FROM A RECORDING AND NOT COPIED FROM AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF MISHEARING AND THE DIFFICULTY IN SOME CASES OF IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS, THE BBC CANNOT VOUCH FOR ITS COMPLETE ACCURACY.

“FILE ON 4”

Transmission: Tuesday 12th May 2020

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Producer: Paul Grant

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MUSIC AND BIRDSONG

PEARSE: This morning I woke up on a gorgeous spring day and left the house, the streets were deserted and the trains were almost completely empty. Whilst my family stayed at home where it's safe, I showed my ID badge to the security guard at the door of the Royal London Hospital and walked up to the Intensive Care Unit to put myself in harm's way. We're on the front line of a war against an enemy we cannot see. Already, so much has changed in order to win this fight. It is hard to imagine that things will ever be quite the same again. This is our war.

DEITH: It's mid-March. Coronavirus has reached pandemic proportions. A group of doctors and nurses from around the country has started keeping diaries for File on 4. On the wards, behind their masks, we can't read their faces. But, when they find a moment to stop and press record, they reveal their private emotions and professional fears.

THORNE: I'm not going to be able to cope with this, because it feels like I can't give my patient what they should be having, because you look after somebody the way that your parents should be looked after, anybody.

DANIELS: To watch a teenage girl saying goodbye to her mum on Facetime and saying, 'I'm going to make you proud,' it's hard.

ANITA: I want to work, but I really want to do it safely - the thought that I could somehow harm my daughter by choosing to go to work is a really, really difficult position to be in as a mum.

MUSIC

READER: Monday the 16th March. Social distancing begins.

DEITH: A virus, which seems to have out of nowhere, has changed our lives completely. There's no vaccine, there's no cure. We're told our loved ones could die before their time. But doctors and nurses are going to fight for them.

ACTUALITY WITH PPE

PEARSE: So I'm just putting on PPE. Now I have to put on a mask, make sure it fits just right, into the Intensive Care Unit. Pair of goggles.

DEITH: We're with Rupert Pearse. He's married with four daughters, and is a consultant in Intensive Care at the Royal London Hospital.

PEARSE: Today I'm with a gentleman who's been admitted to Intensive Care with Covid-19. A local Bangladeshi gentleman in his fifties. The most obvious thing is he's got a tube in his mouth and that's connected to a ventilator puffing away in the background. He's got various cables leading away; there's one on his finger which tells us how much oxygen is in his blood. There is a trolley with a series of syringe pumps, all stacked up, with labels saying what types of drugs are going through. So all in all, it's very, very complicated, but most important, at the end of the bed is our nurse Anna.

ANNA: Hello.

PEARSE: And she's by the bedside all the time. And Anna's not a trained Intensive Care Unit, she normally works in operating theatres recovery, and has been redeployed today to look after Intensive Care patients during the Covid pandemic.

DEITH: Already our hospitals are unrecognisable. Routine surgery is being cancelled and theatres turned into Covid-19 wards. But the fear that the NHS will be overwhelmed leads to a drastic measure we couldn't have imagined - until it happens.

MUSIC

READER: Monday the 23rd March. Week one of lockdown.

EXTRACT FROM BORIS JOHNSON SPEECH

JOHNSON: From this evening I must give the British people a very simple instruction. You must stay at home, because the critical thing we must do to stop the disease spreading between households, that is why people

THORNE: We're in lockdown so we are not going anywhere. Just going to have a barbecue in the garden with myself, my husband and my two children and the dogs.

DEITH: This is Larissa Thorne. She lives in Aylesbury with her husband Graham, and her kids Sky and Tyler. While they stay at home to protect the NHS, she's going to save lives. She's an Intensive Care nurse at Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

THORNE: Tyler, how do you feel about Mummy when she goes to work?

TYLER: Sad.

THORNE: Why is that? What does Mummy do? What's Mummy's job?

TYLER: Looking after people.

THORNE: That's right. So Mummy's going to work tomorrow, so Daddy's going to look after you tomorrow, isn't he?

TYLER: Okay.

THORNE: Yeah? I won't see you in the morning, will I? And I won't see you when you go to bed. I always go in to check on you, don't I? I've been nursing for 19 years now as an Intensive Care nurse and I'm frightened to hell when I go to work. It's the uncertainty of last weekend, where everybody enjoyed themselves in the sunshine. They all socialised and how many more people are going to come in? We will get through this, but unfortunately the longer people don't listen, the longer this is going to go on for. So stay safe, protect the NHS and save lives.

ACTUALITY OF ANITA WITH CHILD

ANITA: I love you!

CHILD: I love you.

DEITH: Next to start her diary is Anita, a midwife and nurse on the south coast, where she lives with her little girl.

ANITA & CHILD: [Singing] Mummy duck said quack, quack, quack, quack, then only four

DEITH: She's been looking after people with possible coronavirus, and is worried she needs more protection – a visor and a mask with a filter, rather than the basic one.

ANITA: This week I was asked to look after somebody with suspected coronavirus and we were told that until the swabs come back - which is taking two to three days at the moment - we're to use surgical masks and gown and gloves when we're

DEITH: We're nearing the end of March and it's clear the spread of the virus is picking up speed outside London - 32 people have died in the West Midlands. Ron Daniels is a consultant in Birmingham.

DANIELS: We've filled the Intensive Care Unit with either confirmed or suspected Covid-19 patients and we've begun to distribute patients who are not suspected to have Covid to other units. These patients with Covid-19 seem to be taking weeks in order for us to begin to understand what's happening. They are sometimes difficult to get enough oxygen into their blood. It is just a waiting game to determine whether or not they'll begin to deteriorate or whether or not they'll be relatively stable and begin to improve.

EXTRACT FROM NEWS REPORT

NEWSREADER: Here the nation applauds NHS health and care workers to give thanks for their tireless work as they try to save lives. And the royals ...

DEITH: This week we start a new tradition - the clap for carers. On the south coast, Anita – our nurse and midwife – is recording.

ANITA: It's one minute to eight [sound of applause] and I'm just at my door - most people are doing clap for carers, for the NHS. And I didn't know if people were going to come out, but they have. It really means a lot to me. I don't know if you can hear it, it's still carrying on, and it really means the world. I just wanted to share that I just feel a bit emotional today. I want to work. I just don't feel that we're being given the right PPE. This all really hits home for me because I'm a single mum, I've got a three and a half year old, but I'm also a mum that's lost a baby before. I had a baby that died of a brain tumour, which I was told was a one-in-a-million chance of her getting, and she was an hour old when she died, so people tell me the statistics that even if I get coronavirus, even if my daughter gets coronavirus, we'll probably be okay, no statistics matter anymore when you've been that one-in-a-million person. And I want to work, but I really want to do it safely. The thought of bringing back an infection, that I could somehow harm my daughter by choosing to go to work is a really, really difficult position to be in as a mum.

DEITH: The risk to NHS staff is real - even those in top to toe protective kit in Intensive Care.

ACTUALITY IN INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

MAN: All right, morning everyone, shall we crack on with the drill?

MANNY: My name's Manny, I'm D side today.

LUCY: Lily, B side.

PJ: PJ, A side consultant.

DEITH: At the Royal London Rupert Pearse's team has been hit hard.

PEARSE: So it's Saturday the 28th March and I've been called into work to cover a colleague who has become poorly and probably has Covid. Of my 17 colleagues in our ICU consultant team, only eight of us are left now who are able to work and the others either have Covid or they are self-isolating with suspected symptoms. I think we're all a little bit frightened now, a little bit for ourselves, a little bit for our family, but also we're getting quite frightened about the decisions we have to make and how we solve the conundrum of providing a ventilated Intensive Care bed for everyone who needs it.

DAHLMAN: They kept telling me, like, even if we have to put you under with a ventilator for a few days, it's still, you know, to help you, it's going to be better.

DEITH: Malin Dahlman is one of Rupert's patients. She was in her flat, where she lives alone, when she started finding it hard to breathe.

DAHLMAN: It's really strange, because you're trying to grasp as much air as you can, but nothing really comes into your lungs. I wouldn't describe it as painful, it's just this pressure on your chest, it's really, really heavy. They kept telling me,

THORNE: I've just received a big bag of fruit and vegetables, a lovely kind gentleman has just come in and it's a whole bed full of food. Fresh stuff, because we can't get out. I think this is the kindest thing anybody's ever done. It's just really kind [crying]. So thank you.

DEITH: You can imagine, even at home, Larissa's mind is full.

THORNE: I've just got home from work. I literally Dettol my arms, my face, my hair and everything. Even with the PPE on, I still feel quite, I feel dirty just purely because I've been wearing that stuff all day. I'm just about to have some supper because I haven't eaten, and actually I'm thirsty, really thirsty. We really did have a good shift, a good team on today, but I've come home, and on the way home I looked at my phone, because I don't take my phone into the Covid wards. There's lots of messages left from my family on our WhatsApp group about my dad. He had a very sleepy day today. Being at work does take it off of my mind a little bit, but I always worry that I'm going to get that call at work about my dad. I'm not sleeping as well as I was. As soon as I wake up in the night, I suddenly think Covid. It's a really bizarre feeling and hopefully one that I will learn to live with and get over.

MUSIC

DEITH: It's the first of April. In London, consultant Maziar Sadri has done ten days straight. Normally there's enough protective equipment - but this week it's been an issue.

SADRI: It was really, really a bad day yesterday. I was getting cardiac arrest calls and medical emergency calls every hour. I had loads of patients that I had to put on ventilator and they were not very old. It seems that every day it's getting harder and harder. In terms of protective equipment, it's the third consecutive day that we don't have enough visors or goggles to protect ourselves. Our other hospital, which is attached to us, is running out of capacity for oxygen supply and they're going to send a lot of the patients to the other site.

MUSIC

DEITH: London hospitals are at full stretch, but it seems the number of people being admitted might be flattening a bit. In the Midlands though, the number has jumped. In Birmingham, consultant Ron Daniels' next diary entry is from the heart.

DANIELS: I've just finished a resident night shift on Intensive Care. Last night, relatively young patient, very, very clearly dying - and we do allow one family member at the end of life to be with their loved one, as long as they understand the risks, but families are not just one person and to watch a teenage girl saying goodbye to her mum on Facetime and saying, 'I'm going to make you proud,' it's hard. And this is something that's happening in every Intensive Care Unit up and down the country every day right now.

MUSIC

READER: Monday the 6th April. Week 3 of lockdown.

EXTRACT FROM NEWS PROGRAMME

NEWSREADER: Now just to bring you some breaking news. Boris Johnson has been admitted to Intensive Care with those persistent symptoms of coronavirus, so just breaking news coming into us within the past

DEITH: In the hospital opposite Parliament, the Prime Minister is in Intensive Care. In an ICU on the other side of London, Maziar Sadri is back on shift after a few days off, and they're in bad shape.

SADRI: We were seeing that a lot of our patients die after being in Intensive Care for a while. We did not have something like this before. Of course, sometimes we failed, but not to this extent. We have become so hopeless in treating patients with higher age, it's pointless to bring a lot of them to the Intensive Care because they're going to die and unfortunately, in some occasion, it might be prolongation of torture. I finished the day with signing a lot of do not attempt CPR forms and, feeling low around

DEITH: I talked to the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine about Rupert's fears. They say it is impossible for a nurse who may be overseeing four, five or even six patients to deliver the usual quality of care, but it is still safe - although they say it's a very finely balanced thing right now. Anita is one of those nurses spreading themselves more thinly. But her protective equipment won't stretch.

ANITA: Wednesday the 8th April, I'm part way through another shift, another department. This department is wearing PPE, but there's a shortage of masks and basically at handover I was handed one mask and I've got to wear it all day, which isn't a safe way to wear a mask. You're meant to discard it after each patient contact. I don't think it's too much to ask for me to feel safe at work.

MUSIC

DEITH: The day Anita recorded that diary, a surgeon, Abdul Mabud Chowdhury, died from Covid-19. More than twenty health workers have now lost their lives. When he fell ill, Abdul Chowdhury warned Boris Johnson – on social media – that there wasn't enough Personal Protective Equipment. His son Intisar says he was desperate others should be safe.

CHOWDHURY: When he wrote that, he was extremely ill. He still felt that he had a duty to protect his co-workers and colleagues. He was such a kind soul. He threw a huge surprise 25th wedding anniversary party, a surprise one for my mother last year. He had my mum believe there was a fake event happening on that day so she'd be all dressed up, and he just, he went out of his way to make my mother happy. He was ill for about the first five days and then he got taken to hospital because he was unable to breathe. In fact, his exact words as my mum called the ambulance were, 'I feel like I'm drowning,' and it was so horrible to see my father in pain.

DEITH: Abdul Chowdhury did well in Intensive Care at first. But he developed sepsis and his body started to shut down.

CHOWDHURY: They had asked my mother to go and see my father, which she did and which I also did. I read a prayer for my dad. I said my goodbyes and asked my dad to forgive me for anything I've done as a son. I'm so proud that he did what he did. Dr Abdul Mabud Chowdhury, I will never let anyone forget his name.

DEITH: Abdul Chowdhury and our consultant, Maziar Sadri once worked at the same NHS trust, and Maziar's former colleague died in his hospital.

SADRI: What I could see in the wife's eyes broke me into pieces. I might have seen last breath of people several hundred times, in some cases you feel a bit of relief for the patient and family if they have had a terminal illness and they have been suffering. But in a case like this, a colleague who has helped a lot of people, seeing him in such a situation was quite disturbing. I feel still privileged to be able to go to the unit, look after the sickest people in the society, but this sense of failure to an extent that I've never experienced in my over two decades of medical practice is overwhelming.

MUSIC

DEITH: It's Easter. The weather's good, and the Government's begging people to stay indoors. Hospitals are seeing the highest number of deaths of the UK outbreak. Doctors and nurses are still asking for more masks, gowns and goggles. Matt Hancock, the Health Secretary, suggests some staff are using more than they need.

EXTRACT FROM SPEECH

HANCOCK: It's really important that people don't overuse PPE either, it is a precious resource.

PRESENTER: That's why I asked you if you thought that had happened.

HANCOCK: Well, if I give you, I ... the reason I won't, I don't want, I don't want to imbue blame on people who have used more PPE than the guidelines suggest, because I understand the difficulties ...

DEITH: Anita, the nurse who says she ended up re-using masks because there aren't enough, isn't impressed.

ANITA: I've just been listening to Matt Hancock saying that NHS staff should be really careful not to misuse PPE and that we should follow the guidelines. I feel like screaming, because the guidelines tell me I can't wear any PPE with patients who are not symptomatic, and yet we know that people can have coronavirus. I could have coronavirus and not be symptomatic, I could be the person spreading this amongst my hospital. And basically [bleep] you, Matt Hancock - I dare you to come and do my job in such close proximity to so many patients who are so vulnerable and not to wear a mask.

MUSIC

READER: Monday the 13th April. Week 4 of lockdown.

DEITH: Boris Johnson is out of hospital and says the NHS saved his life. But ten thousand people have now died. Deputising for the Prime Minister, Dominic Raab tells us we're staying in lockdown.

EXTRACT FROM DOMINIC RAAB SPEECH

RAAB: The Government has decided that the current measures must remain in place for at least the next three weeks. We've just come too far, we've lost too many loved ones, we've already sacrificed far too much to ease up now, especially

DEITH: But Larissa's scared the lockdown could come too late for her dad. The family wants to be together during the time he's got left.

THORNE: Hi, it's the 14th April. I've just come over and done a food run for my mum and dad, and my dad's at the door. You might not be able to hear him very well because obviously I don't want to get too close to him. Dad, how are you feeling?

FATHER: Not too bad.

THORNE: How do feel about all of this that's happening?

FATHER: Well, all I can say is that it's best if everybody stays indoors, like I have for the last three weeks, and try to keep out of the way of other people. Because I've got what I've got, I can't afford to be outside and get caught with anybody.

THORNE: I don't know whether to continue with this because I'm getting upset, my dad's getting upset [crying]. We're like two big emotional tits. It's just really hard because I can't support my mum the way I want to and I know that I can't touch my dad. Well done dad, I love you.

DEITH: Larissa is on a night shift later - and it's a tough one.

THORNE: Good morning. I've just finished work. It's half past nine in the morning. I had a really busy night. I just literally didn't stop. I did have a bit of a cry this morning, it feels like I'm not going to be able to cope with this, because it feels like I can't give my patient what they should be having, but I do, that's probably why I put too much pressure on myself, um, because you look after somebody the way that you'd want to be looked after or the way that your parents should be looked after - anybody. You know, you're entitled to that - to mouth care, to eye care, to someone brushing your hair, giving you a shave. I actually gave my man a shave last night, be it only one side mainly, with the old crappy razors we got, but I done it, I found the time to do that, because I know my dad would want to be cleanly shaven. Yeah. I'm going to go. [Crying] I want to go home. I want to see my children. I want to see my husband.

MUSIC

READER: Monday the 20th April. Week 5 of lockdown.

DEITH: At the Royal London hospital, Rupert Pearse wants to try to break the isolation of ICU, to manage the risk and allow family in. He's been thinking about it after making the difficult decision that a woman who's deteriorated should be allowed to die with dignity.

PEARSE: The patient's daughter had a video phone call with her. The patient was able to communicate, even though she wasn't able to talk. But essentially the patient has died away from her family. This is really sad for us. Care of the dying patient is such an important part of what we do and something we take such pride in. We then had our consultants' meeting and the first major item on the agenda was how we could allow family members to be present at the end of patients' lives. They need to be shown how to don the PPE, the protective equipment, to be brought into the Intensive Care Unit, and then that family member is going to be really upset at a time when our nursing staff in particular are really, really stretched. And then after all of that awful experience, the family member is going to need to be supported while they take off the PPE - and that's really important because that's when you inadvertently infect yourself. And all of that is very, very complicated and very, very difficult.

DEITH: At the weekend, the number of people who've died in hospital from coronavirus passes 20,000; 51 days after the first death was announced. Larissa intends to stay strong for her patients and her family, even though, when she does manage to get to the supermarket, someone does something incomprehensible.

THORNE: A gentleman, when I was coming out the foyer, came towards me and coughed in my face and started to laugh. I was wearing my lanyard, so it had my NHS identification on, and he laughed and he walked off and I just burst into tears, because I just couldn't believe what he'd done. I can't believe people would be so cruel. I want to look after people to the best of my ability. I'm very proud of who I work with, such a sterling team. We're doing an absolutely amazing job under the circumstances, I couldn't be prouder really at the moment. Take care everybody. Bye.

MUSIC

READER: Monday the 27th April. Week 6 of lockdown.

DEITH: Overall, hospitals are starting to see fewer people with coronavirus, and fewer deaths.

EXTRACT FROM BORIS JOHNSON SPEECH

JOHNSON: We are making progress, with fewer hospital admissions, fewer Covid patients in ICU and real signs now that we are passing through the peak. I believe ...

DEITH: In Birmingham, consultant Ron Daniels is feeling the first bit of hope for a long time.

DANIELS: I'm just coming to the end of another night shift and what's really gratifying is these patients that we've got to know over two, three weeks - got to know in a bizarre way because of PPE, because of lack of interaction with relatives - many of them are now either stabilising or starting to get better. Four of them are now ready to go to the ward and another two are very nearly ready to go to the ward and that's just fantastic.

MUSIC

DEITH: Across the country, doctors have seen thousands of people in Intensive Care, and giving that care has never been so intense. They've lost almost as many critically ill patients as they've saved. Adrenaline has got Maziar Sadri this far - but he's exhausted.

SADRI: I am completely drained, myself. The experience of Covid was a very, very hard experience for all NHS staff. They all put their life in danger, at the same time they always had worries at the back of their mind that they might take a deadly virus home and expose their families to illnesses. I really hope that NHS has some reserve so that when we are stretched, we can cope with the difficult times.

MUSIC

DEITH: Hospitals will never be the same again and nor will those who work in them. Doctors and nurses in Intensive Care are used to dealing with death, but they weren't prepared for seeing so many people die - and too often not being able to do anything about it. Rupert Pearse and his patients will have to live with the effects of coronavirus for a long time.

PEARSE: There's talk of easing the lockdown in the news. There's more cars on the streets. It feels like the world has decided to slowly go back to normal. It's very rainy outside, you can probably hear the rain chattering on the windows. It kind of matches my mood, because whilst everybody else is talking of easing the lockdown, it's really not over for us – at least in my hospital. We expect to be dealing with the problem of the Covid outbreak for at least another six months and probably another year. The good news is we've coped, um, but only just. In fact, at one point it was very close. And, as NHS staff, I think we are just a little bit broken.