



The Royal Society of Medicine

Response to Covid-19

May 2020

Introduction

With a reach and reputation respected across medicine and healthcare, from the junior to the most senior, the RSM is in a unique position to support UK healthcare during the unprecedented crisis represented by the coronavirus pandemic.

Beginning in February 2020, as Covid-19 continued its sweep across the globe, the Society convened a meeting of key advisers in UK healthcare and law enforcement to discuss quarantine measures.

Attending the meeting were senior personnel from Public Health England, the Department of Health and Social Care, the legal profession, police, academics, alongside clinicians and practitioners specialising in vaccination, infectious disease, behavioural medicine and behaviour change, epidemiology, history, psychology and ethics.

Then, in March 2020, when the UK-wide Covid-19 lockdown came into force, the Society launched [RSM Live](#), an online platform to enable the continued delivery of the RSM's primary charitable activity of education and sharing learning for doctors and other healthcare professionals.

Read on to learn more about *RSM Live* and the Society's associated activities in response to Covid-19.

RSM Covid-19 Series

The first priority for *RSM Live* was to consider the needs of the clinical community working to treat, prevent and understand the virus and its impact. Experience from other epidemics

shows that conversations that enable front line healthcare professionals to share their experiences as they accrue familiarity with and understanding of rapidly developing situations is a crucial source of learning. This two-way communication between those on the front line and health leaders can also help to build resilience.

To address this need, a webinar programme, the [RSM Covid-19 Series](#), was devised to provide a regular channel of communication between key experts and decision makers and those working to treat and prevent Covid-19.

For health professionals, by health professionals

Broadcasting twice weekly, the series is for health professionals, by health professionals. Each webinar presents a topic on a specific aspect of the pandemic and is chaired by one of several high-profile healthcare leaders, including RSM President Professor Sir Simon Wessely, RSM Trustee Dr Claire Bayntun and RSM President-Elect Professor Roger Kirby.

In each session one or more experts contribute to an insightful and probing conversation about the challenges that healthcare workers, leaders and the public are facing, and how we are responding.

The series began on 2 April with *Facing hard truths on the front line*, an exploration of palliative care in the context of Covid-19 featuring Dr Rachel Clarke. The following episodes have included insights into intensive care with Professor Hugh Montgomery; policymaking on facemasks for the general public with Professor Trisha Greenhalgh; the mental health of healthcare staff with Professor Clare Gerada and former doctor and best-selling author Adam Kay. Dr Alison Pittard and Professor Aine Burns explored the complex and emerging pathophysiology of the virus; Dr Jenny Harries, Deputy CMO for England, discussed strategies to fight the virus, shielding and vulnerable groups; and Professor Sir Michael Rawlins and Professor Stuart Ralston talked about possible drug therapies for Covid-19.



With audiences of regularly over 2,000 for the live programmes, and with over 20,000 views on the RSM's YouTube channel, the webinars have attracted people from over 60 countries.

Hundreds of questions have been posted by people registering for the webinars and while not all can be addressed in the individual live sessions, each month an expert panel deliberates and responds to the most asked questions.

Audience feedback

"Nothing helps more than knowledge right from the best source"

[Episode 3: A view from inside an Intensive Care Unit](#)

"Raised awareness of what must change in the future for the NHS to take it forward - an ongoing important discussion and not before time!"

[Episode 8: NHS Nightingale Hospitals with Professor Charles Knight](#)

"Really useful for sharing amongst vulnerable patients who are mainly from black, asian and certain additional minority communities that I support in various ways"

[Episode 9: Your questions answered](#)

RSM Live for healthcare specialties

Covid-19 is a virus that healthcare workers and the whole of society will have to adapt to for an uncertain period. Learning about how Covid-19 affects different systems, its impact on each of the healthcare specialties, and how routine care can be delivered safely while the virus remains a threat, will form part of healthcare education for some time to come.

The specialist Sections that form the backbone of the RSM have programmes of online education underway for *RSM Live* that reflect the importance of understanding both the acute and longer lasting implications of the virus, together with the impact of the social and psychological toll of the lockdown.

From cardiology, nephrology and intellectual disability, to rheumatology, medical genetics and occupational medicine,

the topics covered by the flourishing online programme will be expanding significantly over the coming months.

Continuing education

Many doctors and healthcare professionals have been re-deployed away from their usual specialist practice or training rotation to care solely for Covid-19 patients. Some, particularly doctors in training whose programmes have been disrupted and whose formal training has stopped, are anxious about losing contact with their specialty.

To help bridge this gap a number of RSM Sections have organised webinars to allow easy access to training for these doctors who will, at some point, return to their specialties or rotations. The webinars stimulate good interaction and allow active polling for contributors who can be based anywhere in the world.

The [RSM Urology Section](#) led the Society's initiative for online specialist training, quickly launching a weekly webinar series featuring experts in their field addressing a variety of specific clinical topics. Of particular note was the [Malcom Coptcoat short papers prize meeting](#) in early May that provided a forum for the presentation of academic and research papers by urological trainees, followed by the state-of-the-art John Wickham lecture delivered by Dr Nadine Hachach-Haram.

RSM Library

In the six weeks to 26 April 2020 there was a 26% increase in page views of the RSM Library e-resources, compared with the previous six weeks.

With a clear need for access to material on Covid-19 by doctors and healthcare professionals treating or preventing the virus, the RSM Library has compiled a resources round-up which is continually updated as new resources become available.

[Follow the link to visit the Covid-19 resources web page](#)

Work is underway to enhance the library's digital capabilities to ensure robust and rapid access to the collections, including guides to the collections and new digital content to support Section events and training programmes.

COVID-19 trials

The urgent need to find treatments for COVID-19 has resulted in changes to trial regulations to make it easier to enter trials. Those caring for patients with Covid-19 need to have easy access to details of trials, [a topic discussed by Professor Hugh Montgomery](#) during the third Covid-19 Series webinar. Following the broadcast, the RSM published information outlining all the national trials linked to Covid-19. [Follow the link to visit the trials information](#)

Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine

The Society's independent journal, JRSM, has published a number of Covid-19 related papers and the May issue was given over to Covid-19 papers.

JRSM editor Dr Kamran Abbasi, in his May editorial, wrote that uncertainty is a natural state for clinicians and scientists; a reality that politicians seem unable and unwilling to grasp. [Read the editorial in full here](#)

Dr Michael Anderson, Professor Martin Mckee and Professor Elias Mossialos discuss the health, economic and public policy implications that need to be considered in developing a sustainable exit strategy for COVID-19. [Read the commentary in here](#)

Dr Sophie Coronini-Cronberg and colleagues warn that disadvantaged and marginalised people face worsening health inequalities as a result of the difficult choices made by NHS hospitals in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. [Read the commentary here](#)

The media, the RSM and Covid-19

RSM President Sir Simon Wessely has been a prominent media commentator throughout the pandemic, speaking on BBC Radio 4 Today, BBC Newsnight, Radio 5 Live and Sky News. He also written features for the Financial Times and the New Statesman.

With such a high-profile line-up of contributors, the *RSM Covid-19 Series* has attracted considerable interest from the media too. Professor Trisha Greenhalgh's views on the use of homemade facemasks and Professor Charles Knight's account of the rapid creation of the NHS Nightingale Hospital London drew press reports from The Independent, the Daily Mail, the Times, Press Association, Health Service Journal and others.

When Sir Simon interviewed Dr Jenny Harries, Deputy CMO for England, extensive media coverage followed, reporting their wide-ranging conversation including the physical and mental health of shielded patients, quarantine plans for air travellers and the impact of a return to school for younger pupils.

Conclusion

Much work has been done at the RSM to provide an agile and flexible response to the continuing educational needs of our community of healthcare professionals, both here in the UK and beyond.

As the pandemic plays out over the coming months, we are committed to finding new ways of delivering creative and stimulating healthcare education and learning for this new and challenging world.

Please consider making a donation

By supporting the RSM you are helping healthcare professionals have access to post-graduate education and innovation during these difficult times.

The education provided by the RSM is funded by membership fees and financial support from donations. Through their generosity our donors play an essential role in helping us fulfil our educational remit. All gifts, no matter how small, make a big difference to our work.

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