

Barts COVID-19 Appeal - COVIDsortium

The NHS is entering uncharted territory with the COVID-19 pandemic, but we still have one single overarching aim – to save lives and improve our understanding of this catastrophic disease.

Barts Health and COVID-19

Here at Barts we are a world-leading cancer and cardiovascular centre looking after some of the sickest and most complex patients using state of the art technology and research. Like everyone, we have seen what is happening overseas and almost overnight have transformed our hospital to treat patients with COVID-19 including quadrupling the number of intensive care beds. The response of our staff has been inspirational. Everyone has had to adapt skills for re-deployment to COVID wards and all resources have been mobilised as far as is humanly possible.

What is needed to help with the crisis?

There are many areas where financial constraints and the unique nature of the situation mean that delivery of optimal care is difficult. PPE is in extremely short supply and staff are caring for patients without adequate protection. Simple communication of clinical information between staff has become extremely challenging given the need for PPE, and the requirement for patients to be isolated. This is severely impacting on staff morale and their ability to deliver the best care to very sick patients.

Staff are also scared. Nearly one in ten of Italy's infected are health care workers. As clinicians, stress and lack of resource are familiar parts of our jobs, but the constant fear of infection from managing COVID-19 patients brings a different order of anxiety to the job. We know that approximately 80% of staff will be infected over the coming weeks, but for most this will be mild or even asymptomatic. Early immune testing for staff (once testing is available) will transform the day to day working for staff members if they have the confidence that they are immune.

Research into COVID-19

We cannot fix this just by working harder in our hospitals. Alongside clinical care, the need for world-class research and science is greater than ever. Barts, in collaboration with University College London and Queen Mary University London, is leading an international study to understand more about the transmission and predictors of severity of disease in COVID-19 patients. We need to establish why some people develop severe disease and others never get ill despite infection. We need to know whether there are targets for drug development to treat the disease or to give people who are exposed. We will look at genetic influences and immunology (including prior protective viral exposure), seek neutralising antibodies, understand the cellular responses and assess ethnic and sociological factors – all by collecting a biorepository of over 50,000 samples taken from our own healthcare staff weekly over the next 16 weeks. These samples will then be divided up and sent to the UK's best academic and pharmaceutical research institutions for collaborative, swift science maximising the yield of the consortium to answer the questions in such urgent need of answers.

Crucially the time to do this science is now. Now because this research has to study people before, during and after infection. And now because we are entering a pandemic, and we need to prevent this happening again. But we have no funding currently – we took the decision to start immediately and find funding later. We have bought the first 3 weeks of the kit and reagents, but 13 more weeks are needed for the complex analysis platforms, sample storage, reagents etc to enable the study to deliver on as many of the aims as is possible – in the fastest time and none of this is funded. Currently UK science labs are shut. We need to get them open and give them the samples to get to work.

How you can help?

We urgently need your help. Whether contributions come in the form of financial assistance or other resources, everything will be put to immediate use. We fully understand the pressures on everybody at the moment, but this is an opportunity to help front-line staff and to deliver research that will provide important insights into the disease and how to prevent it.

Donations can be made via Barts Charity (Charity Registration No. 212563), and please reference the Barts COVID-19 Research Appeal

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/bartscovid19>

For further information about the project please contact Dr Charlotte Manisty, charlotte.manisty@nhs.net 07801819706
For funding questions please contact jolene.retallick@bartscharity.org.uk 020 7618 1720