

Reflections on COVID-19: Dr How Guo Yuan

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On the 6th of February, just after the sudden surge in patients reporting to NCID in view of the expanded screening criteria, the Radiology Department leadership requested for volunteers to reinforce screening efforts at the National Center of Infectious Diseases (NCID). My fellow medical officer, Yicong, and I volunteered for our NCID screening center shifts over the weekend.

Fortunately, my wife and family were very supportive of my new posting. And even though weekend plans had to be cancelled or postponed last minute, I was excited to be able to do my small part for the patients and hospital!

The briefing conducted by the Emergency Department seniors was very clear and concise, and shortly after, I started my shift at the screening center. It was a humbling experience to work alongside colleagues and seniors who remained ever professional and cheerful when seeing each patient, despite working under physically challenging circumstances (the N95 masks and full PPE were highly effective in inducing dyspnoea and activating our sudoriferous glands!). I still remember how an Ophthalmology consultant insisted on doing her own intravenous plug and blood cultures and refused to delegate the job to the junior doctors just because she was a senior. And in fact many of the seniors on shift actively kept a lookout for us juniors despite being uncomfortable in their protective attire themselves. One such instance was when the Emergency Medicine senior on shift made a special effort to heat up dumplings for us during our break after a particularly busy shift! I also had the privilege of making many new friends with the nurses and fellow doctors during the various shifts! (Although I'm only able to identify them by their eyes and names as we were all so "well-dressed"!)

To me, one of the most important takeaways was how our Radiology Department played a crucial role in fighting this outbreak. Much of the management of the patient hinges on the Radiologist's expert opinion of his or her chest radiograph. I have witnessed many times how the chest radiograph report from my colleagues determined the patient's disposition, and while this might have been one of many radiograph reports done that day, but to the patient it had very real consequences. To each patient, encapsulated in those few lines were very real consequences - to be discharged home with a sigh of relief or admitted to isolation.

Throughout my shifts, my fellow colleagues on duty back in our reporting rooms were hard at work reporting the flood of "Stat" chest radiographs ordered by NCID screening staff. And I will never forget the "We-fies" my colleagues sent and the encouragement they gave! After going through this short stint at NCID, I truly appreciate that even though others may joke that we as Radiologists might have almost no patient contact, but the work we do certainly has a huge impact on our patients' lives!