

COVID CONFIDENTIAL



- FRONT LINE WORKERS SPEAK OUT -

A documentary film
by
GRANT WAKEFIELD

Format: HD – Broadcast Quality – 50mbps
Running time: 28 > 37 mins.

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www.grantwakefield.com
[grant\(at\)grantwakefield.com](mailto:grant(at)grantwakefield.com)
(01373) 764 133
(07967) 101 757

SYNOPSIS

The UK suffered the worst death toll from Covid-19 in Europe, and one of the worst in the world, overseen by a government that consistently appeared more concerned with its own image than with its actual policies.

The initial prioritisation of the economy over public health, and the frequent projection of a belief that a positive attitude could somehow affect the behaviour of a virus operating at a molecular level, produced highly confusing messages, fragmented responses, high levels of misunderstanding and the late implementation of lock-down.

The consequences were tragic. Both the economy and public health were worsened as a result, and it was not only vast numbers of the public who paid the ultimate price, it was also the professional health workers of the NHS.

Enduring relentless shifts, and often lacking in crucial medical grade PPE, many staff resorted to desperate measures to protect themselves, including swimming goggles, homemade masks and wearing bin bags.

Caught between their oath to 'do no harm,' an increasingly inept government and a misled and misinformed public, it has still not been officially announced just how many of them died. As at 22nd May at least 180 had, including many retirees who were actively encouraged to return to the front line for 'the good of the nation.'

Yet at the very peak of the crisis, with their lives and those of the public at stake, managers within the NHS itself, under instruction from government, forced them to keep quiet.

Gagging orders prevented staff from 'negatively' posting on social media or talking to the press, on potential penalty of losing their jobs. The few voices that appeared in print media submitted their testimonies mostly anonymously and at great risk. Even staff who protested internally over the lack of testing and PPE were threatened with loss of employment.

This took place in a democracy, under a so-called 'populist' government.

For the first time porters, cleaners, nurses, GPs, doctors, ICU and ward specialists speak freely about their experiences, even if we have to disguise their faces and voices to do so.

We ask what toll the crisis took on them – physically, emotionally and psychologically. What were their reactions to the way the government, the public, and the NHS itself handled the various stages of the crisis? What insights did they gain, and what mistakes can be avoided in the future?

As of August 20th, the UK's current policy is little more than "...*hope for the best*...." whilst half the public no longer trusts nor fully understands the government's advice.

Though some political overlap is inevitable, COVID CONFIDENTIAL concentrates primarily on the public health perspective. How can we as a nation best learn from this experience, and prepare for what may lie ahead, if those with the most direct and personal knowledge of it cannot speak out for fear of retribution?

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Whilst no organisation can ever be 100% perfect, I consider the NHS a national treasure. The true value and essential nature of this public system could not have been more starkly illustrated than by Coronavirus. The film is both an expression of gratitude for, and a tribute to, its staff, and a critique of the political systems that forced many of them into such desperate situations.

I am not employed by any media organisation, nor am I member of any political party or pressure group. I am totally independent. The film is self-financed and non-profit. As such I am completely unconstrained. In terms of editorial I can ask any question I wish. In terms of consequence no one can threaten to sack me, or actually do so. My primary goal is to be a vehicle and medium through which NHS staff can exercise their right of free speech.

STRUCTURE + CONTENT

The film is divided into three parts, corresponding to the principal stages of the crisis:

- 1) Covid-19's spread from China to Europe and its arrival in the UK (Dec. 2019 > Feb. 2020)
- 2) The UK spread, the initial policy responses, the peak and the lock-down (March > June)
- 3) The aftermath, and the UK's possible futures (July >)

Whilst the story is told primarily by NHS staff, one MP and several specialists will also be interviewed to provide scientific context and overviews, including from the fields of epidemiology, psychology + behavioural research, and statistical modelling.

Covid-19 is a 'Black Swan' event, the likes of which has not been experienced for a century. It would not have been possible for the UK to emerge fully unscathed. However, the vast majority of countries in the world have so far dealt with it far better. In the face of this indisputable fact, the film asks questions, and assigns blame, proportionately.

VISUAL APPROACH + PROTECTION OF ANONYMITY

The bulk of the film will comprise of 'talking heads' mixed with abstract slow motion shots of the exteriors of hospitals and research institutes, none of which will be physically named or identified unless specific permission is given. Any random staff in shot will only be photographed from behind, and/or out of focus. Collages of abstract, web based imagery - social media videos, screen grabs, news reports etc - will be utilised as textures, transitions and cut points.

As a default, all NHS staff interviews will be photographed and edited with their voices and faces disguised, unless they unambiguously state otherwise. All locations where interviews are conducted will be exteriors - for Covid safety protocol - and carefully chosen so as to have no identifiable characteristics. No NHS staff member will be ever be identified by name, nor will the hospitals they work in.