

Covid-19 in Germany

At the end of January, the first case of SARS-CoV-2 has been reported and till date the Robert Koch Institut (RKI) counted 2.558.455 cases of SARS-CoV-2 with 73.301 death and 2.352.600 recoveries.

From the end of January 2020 a reporting obligation for SARS-CoV-2 cases has been installed.

In March 2020 the first restrictions came into place and the WHO officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic. With schools closing and changing into home-schooling, travel restrictions, quarantine orders for travellers coming from risk regions, contact tracing and implementing of the so called AHA rules, which include wearing a mask, hygiene rules and distance keeping.

Simultaneously healthcare institutions responded to the new challenge. Visitors no longer weren't allowed (this included relatives, suppliers, taxi-drivers) and masks were mandatory. Rooms have been rearranged to ensure the necessary distance, therapy times changed to prevent crowds at the entrance, appointments for outpatients had to be rearranged and airing has been included in the daily routine. We started to check patients' temperature and for Covid-19 related symptoms before entering and much more.

Staff shortages have existed for a long time and the additional requirements put a strain on us. We had to put up with PPE-shortages, especially masks. FFP2 or KN45 masks could, if at all, just be offered to staff caring for positive or suspected patients. But at the same time people started to develop creative ideas. Initiatives of young people doing the shopping for the elderly, sewing-machines were activated to make masks from fabric, walls of Plexiglas were installed and much more.



People applauded every evening or sang songs at a certain time to support those who couldn't stay at home safely, but had to do their jobs in the healthcare or food providing system. And healthcare staff sent out photos holding signs up which said: "Bleibt zu Hause – wir bleiben für euch hier" (stay at home – we stay here for you).

On the other side health care staff has been bullied with people telling them that they don't want them in the bus, shop etc. because they are carrying the disease. Promises have been made by our health minister – like a bonus payment- and poorly kept. Some employers payed a bonus on their own initiative.

In comparison the number of cases till summer were kept relatively low. And the summer has been a time here to relax a bit. Small outdoor meetings were possible if you kept your distance. Cafes and restaurants opened their outdoor area. If you gave your contact details you could sit and drink a coffee, have an ice-cream or enjoy a meal. Single visitors were allowed into hospitals and nursing

homes at a certain time. That has been a big relief as so many people suffered from loneliness. A lot of them learned how to use devices to keep virtually in contact but you can't beat seeing your loved ones in person – even if you are still not allowed to touch them.

During the summer protests against the restrictions grew louder, people believing in conspiracy theories, meeting in crowds without masks. As we have a federal political system here we have different rules depending where you live/stay. That can be kind of confusing.

Since autumn numbers are rising again and stricter lockdown rules are in place. We have rapid tests now which show in 15 minutes if someone is infectious and a lot of dialysis centres carry out regular tests. Since December Germany started vaccinating elderly and vulnerable people and healthcare staff.

I wonder how nurses and other healthcare staff will make use of the attention we are getting since this pandemic started. It is a chance to make long overdue demands heard. We are not well organized here. Just a small number is a member of an association or union. We just started to organize ourselves in Nursing chambers to have a political voice and it is a very sluggish process.

But if we want to use the public and political attention to improve things for us, our colleagues, trainees and as a result for our patients – we need to join forces. So get out of your comfort zone and at least become a member of an association, union (whatever) to support people who voluntarily use their free time to change things for us all. Because at the end of the day it is a wonderful profession – most enjoyed if the circumstances let us do our job properly.

