

French doctors learn to draw blood as virus knackers nurses

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COVID-19 has French hospitals in dire need of nurses, so seasoned doctors and interns are taking crash courses in drawing blood and other skills long forgotten or never learnt.

"I've never done this before, but it's the kind of thing you learn on the job," said fourth-year medical student Elliott, 22—a vial in one hand and a needle in the other as he practices on a dummy while being instructed in dosage.

Elliott took an express course offered by Paris [hospital](#) group AP-HP, which is desperately seeking solutions for a dearth of nurses as the unprecedented health crisis swamps its facilities.

France has more than 22,700 people afflicted with coronavirus in hospital on top of the usual patient population, with more than 5,500 in [intensive care](#) units (ICU).

More than 3,500 have died in hospital so far.

Once trained, Elliott can be called upon to provide nursing care in the greater Paris region.

"Our vocation is to help" in any way, he remarks.

With other volunteers, including a cardiologist, Elliott learnt to draw blood, start an intravenous drip and inject medicines—tasks normally done by trained nurses.

"What we need most at AP-HP are paramedics and nurses," said director general Martin Hirsch.

The group's hospitals have more than 1,700 COVID-19 [intensive care patients](#) in and around Paris, now the epicentre of France's coronavirus outbreak.

'It comes back fast'

One [nurse](#) usually cares for two to three ICU patients, and on Monday, the AP-HP training platform sent 200 newly-trained medics to hospitals around Paris.

Among those getting a refresher course was a 35-year-old radiologist who declined to give his name.

"It must be 10 years since I have done this," he said while sticking a needle into a dummy's arm. "But it comes back fast."

At first, "I couldn't do anything right, but now I'm feeling better, already more prepared than this morning," he added.

The teacher, a nurse, patiently takes the class through the ABCs of hospital care.

First they are reminded of the importance of following strict hygiene—regularly changing gloves and disinfecting as they go along—especially key in dealing with a highly-contagious virus.

Then they are shown how to apply a tourniquet, disinfect skin, find a vein... and within minutes four new nursing personnel are trained.

"Nursing is not something to be taken lightly, particularly in intensive care, it is essential to train caregivers even if they are already doctors," said the teacher, who also did not wish to be named.

Several dozen volunteers are trained each day, said Hirsch, to be sent to critical and geriatric care wards at hospitals in the Paris metropolitan area.

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