

Lives behind grim coronavirus numbers

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As the coronavirus death toll spirals in country after country, the sheer scale of the pandemic sweeping the globe can sometimes obscure the individual tragedies.

But the more than 43,000 people who have died so far all had their own

stories—young and old, men and women, patients and [medical staff](#) alike.

Here are the cases of five people from around Europe—four who died from COVID-19 and one doctor whose suicide was a 'ricochet' from the outbreak.

Diego Blanco, 46: 'I'm not going to die'

Diego Blanco died at home on March 13 in Italy, the world's worst-hit country.

A paramedic, he worked at the biggest hospital in Bergamo, the epicentre of the outbreak. He tested positive for [coronavirus](#) at the start of March and self-isolated but his health did not initially give cause for alarm.

The day before he died he said to his wife, Maruska Capoferri: "Go to sleep darling, I'm not going to die."

"You reckon you're about to die?" she asked him, half joking, trying to conceal her anxiety. "Don't do that to me." Then she left the bedroom.

When Maruska returned two hours later to check on him it was "too late", she told the Eco di Bergamo newspaper. Her husband had died of a sudden respiratory crisis and fever, followed by a [heart attack](#).

"I gave him heart massage," she recalled. Paramedics then tried to intubate him after they arrived "but there was nothing that could be done for him".

"Helping other people was a mission for him," said Maruska, who has a seven-year-old son, Alessio. The family is one of the first to have

received an 20,000 annual state benefit payout for victims of work accidents.

Diego Blanco didn't smoke or drink and had no health problems. "I never would have believed it," said Maruska, who tried to console herself with the fact that other coronavirus patients often die alone because the disease is so infectious.

"At least he said goodbye," she said.

Julie A., 16: 'We'll never know why'

For 16-year-old Julie A. it all started with a slight cough. A week later, on March 25, she became France's youngest COVID-19 fatality.

"We'll never know why," the high school student's mother Sabine told AFP.

At first they treated the cough with syrup and steam inhalation treatments but a couple of days later she began feeling tightness in her lungs, followed by coughing fits.

Sabine took her to the doctor, who called the [emergency services](#) They then took her to hospital in Longjumeau in the Essonne department south of Paris.

She had a lung scan but doctors said that there was "nothing serious". Yet later that night Julie was again fighting for breath, and she was taken to the Necker children's hospital in Paris.

By Tuesday when she was admitted to intensive care Julie was complaining that "my heart hurts", but two coronavirus tests proved negative.

Sabine said good night to her daughter and went home. A few hours later, the hospital called: one of the COVID-19 tests was in fact positive, and doctors had had to intubate Julie.

"From the beginning they told us this virus doesn't affect [young people](#). We believed it, just like everyone else," said Julie's older sister Manon.

Shortly after midnight, the hospital called again, telling Sabine to come quickly. She and Manon rushed back to Paris, but Julie had died.

"Her skin was still warm," Sabine said.

Tim Galley, 47: 'He was all alone'

Tim Galley, 47, is among the younger victims of COVID-19 in Britain, reportedly succumbing despite being fit and healthy.

He died at his home in Wrexham, north Wales, last week after self-isolating and not seeking [medical care](#), as advised by the government, reports said.

He was found in bed by a neighbour who had been asked to check on him, according to his girlfriend Donna Cuthbert.

"I just can't bear the thought he was all alone," she told local media outlet North Wales Live.

Galley had developed symptoms—first a slight cough, then a fever—10 days earlier, she explained. But he declined to call the state-run health service's helpline because he did not want to divert resources away from more vulnerable people, Cuthbert said.

British health authorities have told people who develop apparent novel

coronavirus symptoms to self-isolate for a week, and only seek medical attention if their condition deteriorates markedly.

"Tim followed the guidelines and took the precautions but still somehow this cruel, cruel virus we think took him," Cuthbert wrote in a distraught post on Facebook.

It attracted hundreds of tributes to Galley, who worked for a bank in northern England.

Cuthbert, 46, who runs a wedding business, described him as her "beloved best friend" and "soul mate".

"My heart is broken into shattered pieces and my kids are truly devastated," she added.

Sara Bravo Lopez, 28: 'Very young'

Sara Bravo Lopez was a young doctor in a small town in central Spain.

"She died of coronavirus, very young, at 28, which is not normal," said a spokesman for the Mancha Centro de Alcazar de San Juan hospital, where she died on Saturday.

Sara cared for patients in Mota del Cuervo, a town of 6,000 people between Madrid and Valencia. "She was very well liked by her neighbours in the village and by her colleagues at the health centre," the hospital spokesman told AFP.

The hospital, in a statement on Facebook, also praised her "human values, her remarkable engagement with people and her professional attitude in dealing with patients".

The medical colleges of Toledo and Ciudad Real, which are in the same region, sent "condolences" and "regrets" by Twitter.

Sara was one of 12,000 health workers who have caught COVID-19 in Spain, where personnel are urgently calling for more intensive care beds and for protective equipment to battle the disease.

Wojciech Rokita, 54: A doctor's suicide

In Poland the outbreak's impact has so far been limited, but coronavirus can also kill by ricochet: for example the suicide of a respected doctor who caught the disease and received hate mail accusing him of infecting others.

Professor Wojciech Rokita, 54, the director of a gynaecological clinic attached to a hospital in the central city of Kielce, had just returned from a trip to Switzerland in mid-March when he noticed he had coronavirus symptoms.

He self-isolated and his health seemed to be good. Both the hospital and regional authorities said he'd had no contact with patients or staff.

But according to local media, four nurses at the infectious diseases clinic where he was tested were also placed in quarantine.

One report said—without giving his name—that before going to be checked he went to a car salesroom. A wave of hateful comments followed on the internet.

The hospital announced his death on March 18, saying only that it was not "directly" linked to COVID-19. It later emerged that he had committed suicide.

His family said it was triggered by the online accusations and said they would take legal action.

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