

Patrick Lamotte: “We all have a role to play in our community”



Patrick Lamotte normally works at Bristol Myers Squibb in Braine-L'Alleud, Belgium, as a Global Clinical Trial Manager. During the recent Easter holidays, he volunteered in a nursing home in Brussels to support healthcare professionals in the fight against COVID-19.

Before working in the pharmaceutical industry, Patrick was a nurse in intensive care and radiotherapy for 15 years. When the corona crisis disrupted our society and economy, he wanted to make a difference and besides sewing masks, he registered as nurse volunteer on the Iriscare platform, a public interest organization for Social Welfare in Brussels. He started to lend a helping hand to healthcare services as a volunteer on 13-April-20.

“The work we do at BMS is always in the best interest of the patients”, Patrick kicks off, *“and when the coronavirus hit Belgium, it awoke the nurse in me and I decided to take on an active role in the care of COVID-19 patients”*. Having worked all his life in the healthcare sector, he applied as a volunteer after spotting a call for help on the Iriscare internet platform and shortly after, he was contacted to work in a nursing home in Sint-Joost-ten-Noode, Brussels, Belgium.

His first day of volunteering coincided with the start of the COVID-19 screenings in nursing homes. Patrick himself was tested for the virus first, then he was briefed by the Nurse-in-Chief and Doctors Without Borders. *“The situation was quite chaotic on my first day because all the staff had to be organized and newcomers had to be trained for the screening”,* Patrick recalls. *“I was then grouped with a nurse and an occupational therapist and we went to test the residents”*.

Just like numerous nursing homes in the country, the one in which Patrick is volunteering encounters many challenges. Floors must be reorganized to create containment areas; residents must be moved, and the work force has to be organized to avoid unnecessary circulation and the risk of the virus spreading from one floor to another. Despite the strict health measures and additional hygiene precautions, the staff is trying to keep the daily life as normal and serene as possible. *“The hardest part for the residents is obviously the suspending of visits as, unfortunately, a lot of them are feeling very lonely,”* Patrick points out. *“But there is a great feeling of solidarity among the staff. Regardless of the noticeable fatigue, you can just feel an overwhelming sense of motivation and enthusiasm.”*

However, the risk of being contaminated by the virus still exists – even when Patrick takes all the possible precautions: *“You have to think about it first, of course. A discussion within the family is important and we concluded that there was a risk, but a calculated one”*. All volunteers and staff from the nursing home apply the hygiene measures to the letter. They constantly wear gloves with a mask and must wear increased protection when treating contaminated residents. *“We wash our hands constantly and when I return home, I take a prolonged shower as well”* Patrick explains. *“Another very important element is to monitor possible symptoms such as a cough or a fever, and to immediately inform the nursing home staff if those symptoms occurs.”*



Prior to volunteering for this crisis, Patrick had to get an authorization from his managers and vow to submit himself to a 14-day quarantine as soon as his volunteer work in the nursing home would come to an end. *“I was pleasantly surprised to get an approval from BMS less than two days after my request – and during the weekend! I am very thankful for the speedy process as it allowed me to help in the nursing home as soon as possible.”*

Patrick is now volunteering a few hours a week and works with other healthcare professionals to, as a team, battle the spread of COVID-19. It was an easy decision for Patrick to go into volunteering given his professional background and his nurse training. He believes that we all have a role to play in our community and he wants to be an active part of it, especially in times of crisis. *“There are times when I feel privileged in my work at BMS and although I work for the good of the patients, I don't always have the opportunity to be in the field, something I sometimes miss. Thanks to volunteering I can combine the best of two worlds; working for BMS and volunteering are very complementary in my opinion. Moreover, it's a unique opportunity for me to work in times of crisis. I give up my free time, but I learn a lot. It's a win-win.”*



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