

MY LAB

BRAVING THE WEATHER

Valerie Bocker, Specialist Biomedical Scientist from NHS Lothian, writes about the dedication of laboratory staff when snow struck.



When a red weather warning comes into effect, people are advised not to travel unless it is essential they do so. Laboratory staff are essential, but aren't often thought of by the mainstream media or indeed by other areas within the hospital. On 1 March, when "the Beast from the East" hit Scotland, we were asked to provide situation reports to hospital management on how our services were coping. In laboratories, we are proud to say that, although we were functioning with slightly reduced staff numbers, we were confident we could continue to provide the service. We were able to do this due to the dedication and commitment of staff on our four blood science laboratory sites.


There are four acute hospitals across Lothian, providing general and specialist adult, paediatric and maternity services. The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh (RIE) is a major acute teaching hospital with a 24-hour A&E department. Our hospital provides a full range of acute medical and surgical services for patients from across Lothian and specialist services for people from across the south east of Scotland and beyond. In our blood sciences laboratory at the RIE, we process approximately six million tests per year and across the four sites we perform over 11 million tests per year.

Living in Edinburgh city centre, we



didn't think it would be that bad, even with the red alert. Most of the heavy snow had missed us, so a lot of us thought it would be OK. I was surprised to find out there was no public transport and no chance of getting a taxi either. I checked social media and saw that our Operations Manger had started walking from home, which is around five miles from the hospital. There was no excuse for me not to walk too, considering I live closer! Many staff walked (or cycled) several miles in deep snow and blizzard conditions to get to our hospital. Those able to drive were digging their cars out of driveways and clearing local roads hours before their shifts. They also offered to take as many people as they could to and from the hospital. Some staff also worked double shifts, including night shifts, to cover for

those unable to come in. Even those on annual leave offered to come in to help. Members of the public stopped to pick up staff walking to work, and private companies with 4x4 vehicles offered their services to transport staff after their shifts. Staff who couldn't make it to their own laboratory went to the nearest within the health board to do their shift there instead.

I was shattered by the time I got to work, and the thought of doing the return journey filled me with dread. However, I was incredibly lucky on the way home – I walked as far as the local shopping centre and managed to book a taxi. Some weren't so lucky, but they did manage to fit in a visit to a local pub to break up their long walk home. 

With thanks to **Robyn Gunn**.