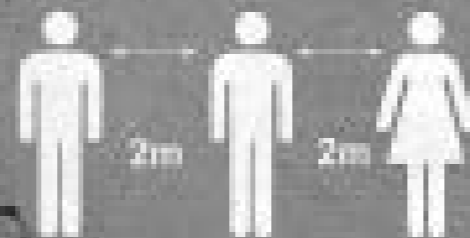


# THE BIG QUESTION

## THIS MONTH WE ASK

“How do you think the public has coped with the last year of lockdowns and social restrictions?”

Stay Safe  
Leave a space



Angela  
Jean-François

Director of Operations  
North West London Pathology

I thought I would be brave and put this question out to social media, to ask my friends and family, as together we form “the public” in one way or another. Whilst I expected some comments about conspiracy theories, what I actually received were responses from all over the world that all spoke with similar voices. Stories of lives being put on hold, concern about our children, their education and impact of loss of social interaction. Hardships, as jobs have been lost and families struggle to keep their heads above water. Stories of personal losses, funerals attended online and an inability to be there for others; to comfort and care.

One friend, a carer in the community, spoke of how colleagues have “switched off” their own feelings to ensure that the people being cared for have their spirits lifted and the frustration to not be able to see their family again. But what cut through all the messages was stories of hope and compassion – how communities have come together to ensure that no-one is forgotten.

Time has given way to thought; stopping in the street and talking with strangers; finding innovative ways to stay in touch; lockdown birthdays with social dis“dancing” on Zoom; WhatsApp groups for entire streets to provide care for those who need it. There is an appreciation of the things achieved and of the closeness and bonds reforming in families that had been lost in the busyness of past lives.

IMAGE: GETTY



Madihah Abbas

Specialist Biochemistry Team Manager  
The Christie Pathology Partnership

The current coronavirus pandemic presents a considerable challenge to public health not just within the UK but globally. All the social distancing measures, including the banning of public gatherings, closure of schools and all non-essential shops, workplaces and services, have caused a huge impact, not just psychologically, but also through loss of structure and routine.

However, this situation has brought the best out in all of us, in terms of reinforcing the strength of connecting with others – community spirit and new ways of interaction by utilising social media platforms. In order to stay connected and gain a sense of purpose, everyone has had to adapt to change. Who would have thought of arranging a virtual coffee chat before COVID-19? Household quarantine has allowed more time with family, and a general appreciation for everything that is taken for granted.

We are all carrying out a variety of activities, including yoga, meditation, walking in nature, or just taking some time out for ourselves with a good book, to stay focused. Initiatives from employers such as Mental Health Awareness Week provided by Synlab and wellbeing events are aimed at helping us reduce stress and be happier. Also, the little things are making a big difference as well – from simple thank-you gestures of chocolates, to motivational post-it notes, and remembering it’s OK to ask for help. Above all, we have supported one another and discovered that we really are stronger when we work together.



Joanna Andrew

Laboratory Medicine Manager (designate)  
York and Scarborough Hospital

I think on the whole the public has coped well. We are all in this together and although people have been affected in many different ways, there has been a sense of solidarity and support. Social media and technology, such as Zoom, has helped people feel connected and less alone. However, I think this is now wearing a bit thin. The public in general never imagined that one year on we would be in a third nationwide lockdown, with some areas of the country having never really opened up at all.

It is getting harder to remain positive. This will have a long-lasting impact on us all.