

# A look at the **first digital Biomedical Science Day** and the **work** that the IBMS has been doing to **promote the profession** and **support members** during the pandemic.

**G**iven our profession's uniquely important role in healthcare, it is strange that, until recently, patients (and writers of most medical dramas) did not know or think about where their samples went or where the evidence needed for diagnosis came from. We were victims of that age-old proverb: "out of sight, out of mind". Then, on 16 March 2020, everything changed when, in the wake of COVID-19, the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Chebreyesu stood before the global media and told the world to "test, test, test".

It was one week before the UK-wide lockdown and tensions around catching the virus were high. People were uninformed, confused and scared. Why do we test if we don't have a cure? What does testing involve? Who does the testing? After years of telling people that most diagnoses are reliant on laboratory work and that our profession performs hundreds of millions of tests per year, the public were suddenly interested in testing and diagnosis. At the IBMS, we knew that

this was not only an opportunity to raise awareness of our members' role in the response to the pandemic, but also a necessary public service.

Attempts were made to penetrate the conversation before the virus was first announced as arriving in Europe, with articles and press releases created on the then new and unnamed coronavirus that had been identified in China. However, it was not until 2 April when the Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced the government's target to reach 100,000 COVID-19 tests by May that we were able to get the media's attention with a press release the next day about PCR testing, capacity and supplies.

Our statement made headlines across national newspapers (including a front-page leader in *The Guardian*) and led to a journalist from *The Daily Mail* quoting us in a question at the government's daily briefing. We had made it clear that our members were primed and ready and that there was capacity for 100,000 tests – but that more supplies were needed. Now that we had the media's attention and the story

had become all about testing, we knew we would become one of the "go-to" sources for journalists.

## **In the run up to Biomedical Science Day, COVID-19 was changing how people thought about healthcare**

Since then, IBMS President Allan Wilson has been kept very busy with media interviews and broadcast appearances. He has worked tirelessly to raise our members' issues on the national stage, and this has been a testament to his dedication to the profession. Every day, from 3 April until 1 May, Allan contributed to a national news article on TV, radio or in a newspaper. On one Saturday morning he was interviewed for Channel 4 and ITV News, whilst on another occasion he was extensively interviewed on BBC Radio 5 Live one evening and the following day the BBC national radio networks played parts of his interview as a soundbite across all of their news bulletins.

IBMS Virology Panel Member Dr Sarah Pitt has also been going above and



beyond, making sure that sensible, fact-checked information is going out into the public domain through trusted news sources and taking part in local, national and international TV and radio shows on our behalf. There have been lots of other members helping us behind the scenes too, and more still who have been turning up in local and national stories.

By supplying information and responding to media enquiries, we believe that the quality of the science reportage has gone up and that the public are also much more well-informed – about COVID-19 and the workforce behind sample testing. For a couple of months, it was nearly impossible to watch the news without seeing a virologist or a laboratory. Of course, there were those who consistently confused sample collecting with testing and there was a government strategy that failed to fully utilise the testing provision that the NHS had at its disposal, but all the while testing and the work of the biomedical science profession was at the front of everybody's minds. Not quite so out of sight, out of mind anymore.

Allan says: "Before the pandemic the public tended to view hospital laboratories as a little black box where a sample goes in and a result comes out. But thanks to the statements we put out in response to the government's testing strategy we were able to grasp the media's attention to raise our members' concerns and raise the profile of the profession.

"As one of the few organisations offering a solution going forward, we're in the heat of this. We have offered solutions to the government and also shared them with our members, the media and the public. Because of this we are now regularly engaging and meeting with Professor John Newton who is the government's testing coordinator and he appreciates our experience and is listening to our advice."

It is fair to say that going into Biomedical Science Day this year, the general public was beginning to understand that scientists were testing

their samples in laboratories. This was a huge breakthrough for our profession. This awareness will undoubtedly strengthen our voice going forward. Now that people know that we exist and appreciate that we are an important part of the response to COVID-19, they will want our pathology departments to be strong and in good order so that we can respond to any future pandemics swiftly.

### The first ever digital Biomedical Science Day

At the start of lockdown, we did not believe that we would still be hosting our annual awareness event. Just weeks earlier, a memo to members informed them of our plans to postpone Biomedical Science Day until later in the year, when

we hoped public engagement might be appropriate again. However, it soon became apparent that, rather than postpone or cancel the event, this year would give us an incredible opportunity to reach more people, inform them about what we do and raise awareness of the vital role of biomedical science in healthcare.

Anas Nasir, a Specialist Biomedical Scientist who works in haematology and transfusion science, says: "It has taken a global pandemic to bring the work of healthcare science professionals into focus but, with the emphasis on testing and testing numbers, the public has been exposed to the hidden workforce in laboratories.

"Biomedical Science Day gave us all a more positive opportunity to showcase the

## BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE DAY IN NUMBERS



This year was the first ever digital Biomedical Science Day



3000

On Twitter, #AtTheHeartOfHealthcare was used over 3000 times

#  
10

The hashtag stayed in the top 10 most popular on Twitter all day

4

It peaked at the fourth most popular hashtag on the platform



8.5m

Analytics show that these tweets had a potential reach to over 8.5 million people around the world

500k

Biomedical Science Day Facebook posts were seen by over half a million people





## *It has taken a global pandemic to bring the work of healthcare science professionals into focus*

work we do to other colleagues, patients, students and general members of the public. With the power of social media, a presentation that would traditionally be seen by 50 people can now be seen by 500 and a tour of the laboratories attended by five individuals can be seen by an unlimited number. Historically a somewhat introverted profession, we now have the means to open our doors and dispel myths and educate.”

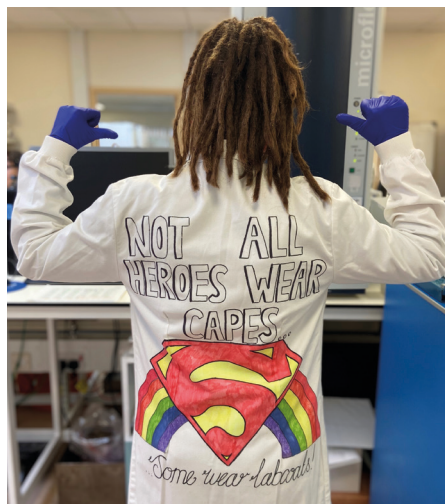
On Thursday 11 June 2020, our members stood tall and celebrated Biomedical Science Day with great spirit and professionalism. There were no laboratory tours, or peopled stands in foyers, but that did not stop our innovative members from pulling out all the stops to take the public on virtual tours and provide informative videos.

The digital celebrations went on all day – providing the public with ever greater clarity about the role of the profession #BehindEveryTest. There was a sense of excitement and pride in laboratories across the UK, as our members rightly celebrated their efforts on the frontline of COVID-19 testing and beyond.

On social media, we encouraged our members to use our hashtags to promote their activities. On Twitter, #AtTheHeartOfHealthcare was used over 3,000 times and was in the top 10 UK

Twitter trends all day, peaking at No. 4. Analytics show that these tweets had a potential to reach over 8.5 million people around the world.

The day kicked off with a well-received video message to our members from our President, expressing his pride at how the profession had worked during the pandemic. Throughout the day, some big name Twitter accounts thanked the profession and offered their support, including Arlene Foster – First Minister of Northern Ireland, NHS England and NHS Improvement, Chief Scientific Officer for England Dame Sue Hill and Minister of Innovation at the Department of Health



and Social Care Lord Bethell. On BBC Radio 2, biomedical scientists received shout-outs throughout the day. Another example is BBC Radio Manchester, which interviewed IBMS member Helen George to learn about our vital role in healthcare.

Across the UK, communications teams in hospitals and university laboratories handed their social media accounts over to their pathology staff and allowed them to celebrate and inform their followers about the skills and expertise involved in their practice. We lost count of the number of wonderful and informative videos and digital tours from our members who were doing social media takeovers for their trusts and hospitals.

On Facebook there were lots of messages of support from charities and other healthcare pages and our online community were active and posting pictures and videos for our competitions all day. Half a million people saw our posts, including our photo gallery, where we compiled a large number of the photos and competition entries from around the four nations. If you had your photo taken on the day, it's likely you will have ended up in there.

In Scottish Parliament a motion supported by 16 MSPs was submitted by MSP Gil Paterson to ask that: “Parliament recognises Biomedical Science Day on 11

## We want to thank all of our members who were involved in Biomedical Science Day 2020

June 2020: considers that, in the UK, biomedical scientists and laboratory staff play a key role in delivering high-quality pathology services that are the backbone of the NHS, including screening for, reporting on and monitoring all diseases and viruses: further understands that healthcare laboratories are involved in over 70% of diagnoses in the NHS and handle more than one billion samples every year, and thanks biomedical scientists, clinical scientists and laboratory staff for their work at the heart of healthcare.”

We want to thank all of our members who were involved in celebrating Biomedical Science Day 2020. It fills us with pride to see so many experts across the four nations rising up and showing everybody just how skilled and valuable you truly are.

### Going forward

It is important that our profession is recognised – not just because it is nice to be appreciated for our contributions, but because when our skills are fully understood and acknowledged then the people who make decisions about our roles and departments will take the correct action.

At the IBMS, we believe in creating opportunities for our members and giving you the tools you need to succeed. This means promoting your work, supporting you with useful services and helping you to develop and progress.

For us, right now, this means flying the biomedical science flag all year round and



celebrating our members' contribution to healthcare (so send us your good news and stories – [communications@ibms.org](mailto:communications@ibms.org)), developing online content for your CPD (we hope to be able to tell you more about that soon) and forging pathways to new qualifications that are relevant to your ever-changing workplace.

Now that your colleagues and the public know more about you and what you are capable of, we want to help you build on that – so that you can begin to define the boundaries of your roles and expand into advanced practices, or develop into senior managers.

### How you can help

For most of our members, Biomedical Science Day is simply a nice chance to get

the team together and acknowledge and enjoy the contribution of your combined efforts. We love this aspect of it and are always thrilled to see the team photos full of happy faces coming in for the competitions. We know that what you do at work is already more than enough.

We also know that a lot of our members find great meaning and value in giving back to the profession. For some people this means volunteering as an examiner or verifier, going out to schools or careers fairs, or holding meetings for local IBMS regions or branches. But, increasingly, it also means developing digital skills and getting involved in online communities.

One thing the pandemic has taught us is that a lot of things can still get said and done with an internet connection. For instance, we have introduced virtual verifications that have actually made the whole process more efficient. So, perhaps think about adding your voice to one of our online communities and making our profession more present to others.

Every day, we post on Facebook and Twitter and the comments and conversations that go on under the line help us to keep up with what our members are thinking and feeling. Your professional voice could help somebody else on the other side of the country in the same position, and give the rest of the community context for their own experiences.

Every member voice is important – so get involved! 