

# Looking after yourself at home if you have symptoms of Covid-19

Q&A with Shaun Clayton, director of membership support at the PHA UK and Paul Sephton, former PH nurse and now research support and development coordinator at the PHA UK

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**Shaun:** Some people may recognise our voices if they've called the PHA UK, but we thought it would be a good idea if we explained who we are before we get into any detail of what this is about.

I'm Shaun, I work directly here at the PHA UK and have done for seven years in my current capacity of director of membership support. With me is Paul Sephton, who is still on the nurses register and was a ward manager at the Sheffield Pulmonary Vascular Disease Unit at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital so some of you may know him quite well.

**Paul:** I will have met and spoken to quite a few of you. I'm now working at the PHA UK but am still a registered nurse and still want to keep that qualification. I work at the PHA UK in research support and developmental co-ordinator – I was a ward manager at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield as Shaun said, and before that I was a specialist in the PH unit.

**Shaun:** Today I thought we'd focus primarily on symptoms of COVID-19 and how to look after yourself at home if you get symptoms. So this is advice primarily for people with PH but also for anyone who's having the symptoms in general such as family and friends – it's not just people with PH who are affected by this as we've seen. I've never known anything like this before – have you Paul?

**Paul:** Never and nor has anything ever taken over everything and everybody so much.

**Shaun:** It's the one thing which has galvanised the world which is really unique. So with your nurse hat on, it would be worth reminding people what the symptoms are of COVID-19.

**Paul:** I think we should focus particularly on the fever and a new and persistent cough. I think there are lots of other symptoms that people are experiencing but I think those two are the constant. It's really difficult because you can start off feeling as though you've got a cold – I think it's different for PH patients per se because we advised them from the start of this to self-isolate and be careful of who's coming in and out of the house, whereas others will wait for the symptoms to arrive and then self-isolate. But we should focus very much on a fever and new very persistent cough – they're the key things.

**Shaun:** If the symptoms are similar to a heavy cold or flu, what medications could people take to help with that?

**Paul:** With fever and colds, paracetamol is excellent in my opinion. Obviously some people can't take paracetamol so you'll need to use the alternative that you would normally use, and that's the thing

to think about – what would you normally take if you had a cold or flu, what would be the alternative? Neil Hamilton, the consultant pharmacist at Sheffield, does talk quite a bit about medication on the PHA UK website so it's well worth referring to that. Just to reiterate what he says, we wouldn't recommend things like ibuprofen or other anti-inflammatories over a long period of time – a one-off is alright but we wouldn't recommend taking it regularly.

**Shaun:** So that's what you can buy over the counter, but obviously some people are going to be on medication that they've been taking for years. I know one of the things that Neil spoke about was not to stop taking anything unless you've spoken to the person who started you on it.

**Paul:** Absolutely – that needs to be continuous. Never stop taking things without talking to who prescribed them.

**Shaun:** Is there anything you can do in terms of eating or drinking that could help you?

**Paul:** I think it's quite personal to what you like, but fluids for me are the key thing particularly if you've got fevers or sore throats. Fluids are everything and you don't want to go days and days with a lack of food or something substantial, but the key thing when you feel unwell is to keep your fluids up. Water is brilliant or some diluted pop, anything like that. When you've lost your appetite it's hard to build that back up, and that goes for any virus. Fresher food is good but we're living in a time where it's more difficult to access it. But even a tin of baked beans is good.

The main thing is fluids, but eat well and when you've lost your appetite, you've got a sore throat and a fever, soups and ice cream are brilliant. If you've got no symptoms at all and you're self-isolating like the majority of our patients are, it is literally just about keeping that healthy balanced diet because you've got less exercise going on. Doing some gentle exercise like Carol Keen talks about makes you feel better strangely. I'm a bit terrible for exercise – I love walking but sitting in front of the TV and doing exercises is not my bag really. But things like that at the minute would really help, and having that routine which includes that exercise. So your meals are planned a little better and your day is planned as if you're going to work or if you don't work, what would you normally do, depending on how much your PH allows you to do in a day? It's just about trying to keep some sort of routine while you're so constricted because many of the patients we see can get out and about at times. I think it's important to remember that suddenly you are very isolated despite the people you're seeing in the household or by phone.

**Shaun:** One of the old wives tales that I was brought up on was 'starve a fever, feed a cold'. Is that applicable?

**Paul:** Not at all. Unfortunately when you feel so unwell you hardly feel like drinking at times, but it's important to keep it going and often drinking over a period of time is better. Coronavirus is very different because obviously it's not just a normal cold or common virus, but think how you react if you felt unwell and got the true flu feeling. A lot of PH patients experience fatigue, pain and breathlessness so you already have to do quite a lot of planning if you want to do things so it's just about bringing that into play when you're more restricted than ever.

**Shaun:** Is there anything else people could be doing to look after themselves if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19?

**Paul:** It will affect everybody in a different way, but if you do experience symptoms of COVID-19 you will be self-isolating anyway. If you aren't feeling well, whether it's over a day or a couple of days, get in touch with your PH centre just to alert them and get any advice from them. Or you can get advice from us at the PHA UK because at first the symptoms could be quite mild. Professor Paul Corris was talking about the idea that everybody will have to get treatment locally rather than going to their specialist centre, but you should still make your centre aware and then take it from there.

**Shaun:** So just to finish off, we want to reassure our members that we're working really hard to support you during this difficult time and each and every day we'll be adding lots of information and resources onto the website and social media posts. So look after yourselves and don't forget that we have extended our office opening times. It'll either be me or Paul who are there and we're working Saturdays and Sundays between 10am and 1pm so if you've got any questions we'll do our best to get back to you and help you out.

**Paul:** Always leave us a message or email the PHA UK office because we will get back to you. We're not an emergency service but we are here to give as much reassurance and support as we can, and to help the PH centres because obviously they will be inundated on the front line. So we can't always get back to you straight away but we will get back to you. But just to reiterate, if you are very unwell, you must go through the normal channel of your GP or 111 as the website suggests.

**Shaun:** Thank you everybody and stay safe. Look after yourselves and each other.