



COVID-19 case study 2020-21

## COVID-19 ICU Remote Learning Course

Rapid ICU training for healthcare staff to bolster the critical care workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic

### AT A GLANCE

#### CHALLENGE

The need to rapidly train non-critical care staff to increase ICU capacity to meet the surge of critically ill patients during the pandemic.

#### KEY CHANGES

A pioneering online course taught by 100 frontline, self-isolating or shielding ICU clinicians and academics. A rehabilitation course was subsequently created for chronically ill patients.

#### BENEFITS

More than 2,500 staff from more than 170 organisations were trained on the two courses. They also provided support and a safe space for staff to talk about their concerns and redeployment.

### THE CHALLENGE

At the peak of the pandemic in England, around 4,000 patients with COVID-19 were being treated in critical care every day. Hospitals doubled their capacity to cope. With critical care units busier than they had ever been, there was an urgent need to rapidly train non-critical care health care staff to bolster the workforce. Staff were anxious about being redeployed and the need for protective personal equipment added to these stressful working conditions, creating a dehumanising environment for patients and staff.

### WHAT THEY DID

The idea for the COVID-19 ICU Remote Learning Course (CIRLC) came from clinicians from the National CLEAR programme and tutors from Brunel University. Developed in seven days, the pioneering one-day blended course comprised pre-recorded lectures followed by interactive tutorials from shielded, experienced clinicians. The creators were a partnership of 33n, Brunel University and Health Education England. It secured rapid endorsement from the Intensive Care Society and was rolled out nationally. The course was continually refined as guidance changed, for example, prone positioning of conscious patients was integrated into the content as this treatment strategy emerged.

## OUTCOME

More than 1,800 NHS staff were trained on the ICU course during the first and second waves of the pandemic including staff redeployed to the NHS Nightingale Hospital London. Candidates came from more than 170 organisations throughout the UK and Ireland. They included doctors, nurses and physiotherapists who learned new skills essential for working in critical care including monitoring ventilated patients and delivering sedatives. In the first wave, the course was offered free of charge with tutors recruited on a volunteer basis.

As the need shifted from acute care to rehabilitation, a supplementary course focusing on multi-disciplinary rehabilitation for chronically ill critical care patients was created. Key experts from different professional backgrounds including nursing, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, dietetics, occupational therapy and psychology were involved in the course content. More than 800 candidates completed the course between May 2020 and January 2021.

"Absolutely amazing course that was interactive, informative and gave me real insight into ICU and what to expect with COVID-19 as a brand new band 5"

Alice Feltham, CIRLC alumnus  
and Physiotherapist

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"The pace, scalability and ability to change the educational resource you produced is a real demonstration of what can be achieved when experts across various sectors collaborate"

Peer reviewer, Journal of the  
Intensive Care Society

## IMPACT

The CIRLC course was highly commended for the Regional COVID-19 Response Partnership Award at the HSJ Partnership Awards 2021. HEE described the training as "an example of workforce agility at its best."

The courses greatly increased the confidence and competence of participants, including those with no experience of working in critical care or the rehabilitation of critically ill patients. The training also provided a "safe space" where NHS staff could be honest about their fears and provide vital support to each another.

Critical care specialists forced to self-isolate welcomed the chance to share their expertise at critical periods in the pandemic. Since then, HEE has commissioned further delivery of CIRLC across London to maintain a flexible critical care workforce.

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