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By Robert Stevens

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As Europe's COVID-19 death toll nears 50,000, British PM Johnson admitted to hospital

In a dramatic turn of events, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was admitted to hospital in London Sunday night with persistent symptoms of COVID-19. He tested positive for the disease 10 days ago.

The *Guardian* reported that it was "told last week that Johnson was more seriously ill than either he or his officials were prepared to admit, and that he was being seen by doctors who were concerned about his breathing." The *Times* reported that Johnson "was given oxygen treatment" at St Thomas' hospital.

His pregnant fiancée Carrie Symonds also has the virus, as does his key adviser Dominic Cummings. Cummings' uncle, retired senior judge Sir John Laws, died from the disease yesterday after being hospitalised for three weeks with other health problems.



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson holds a news conference giving the government's response to the new COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak, at Downing Street in London, Thursday March 12, 2020. (Simon Dawson/Pool via AP)

Thousands continue to die every day in Europe of COVID-19. On Saturday, a further nearly 3,000 people died across the continent. Deaths in Europe are approaching 50,000. By Sunday evening, overall deaths reached 49,096 as a further 2,902 people died.

Europe is reporting nearly 40 percent of all new COVID-19 cases globally, with Sunday's 26,786 taking the European total to 645,295.

The reported death toll consists mainly of people who have died in hospital. Many countries are excluding those who die at home or in care/residential homes from their daily totals. There is mounting evidence that fatalities are much higher when deaths outside hospital are factored in.

On Saturday, one care home in Glasgow, Scotland, reported that 13 of its elderly residents had died. There are more than 410,000 people in care homes in the UK. This represents four percent of the over-65 UK population and 16 percent of those aged 85 or above.

French health authorities have recorded an extraordinary surge in the number of cases and deaths in recent days, with the number of newly dead rising from several hundred to over a thousand. April 2 saw 2,116 cases and 1,355 deaths, April 3 saw 23,060 new cases and 1,120 deaths, and April 4 saw 7,788 new cases and 1,053 deaths—nearly doubling the overall death total over these three days alone.

With Sunday's figures of 1,873 new cases and 518 new deaths, the total in France to date is 92,839 cases and 8,078 deaths.

The main reason for the extraordinary surge in the number of cases was evidently the sudden inclusion of contagion and mortality statistics from France's rest homes.

A horrific outbreak is ravaging France's elder care homes, amid shocking and malign neglect by the authorities. The French government deliberately chose not to use the nationwide reporting system established in rest homes to report on flu deaths. It did not receive real-time data and refused to provide more than three COVID-19 testing kits per rest home, even after reports emerged that dozens were dying of COVID-19 in rest homes across the country. Now it appears that tens of thousands, at the very least, have died.

In Italy, there have been nearly 16,000 deaths (15,887), representing almost a quarter of all global fatalities. Italy is one of many countries recording only hospital-based COVID-19

deaths. The 525 death total announced Sunday was the lowest figure since a record high 969 fatalities on March 27.



Coffins with the bodies of victims of coronavirus are stored waiting for burial or cremation at the Collserola morgue in Barcelona, Spain (Image Credit: AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)

A huge number of people remain hospitalised (28,949), but for the first time this figure fell (by 61) between Saturday and Sunday. Despite this, the number of new infections increased by 2,972. While this was an increase of more than 3 percent in 24 hours, it is a drop of nearly 50 percent from the height of new cases on March 20.

Reuters reported the tragedy of one family. Silvia Bertuletti phoned health services for 11 days to try to get a doctor to see her 78-year-old father, Alessandro, who had a high fever and was struggling to breathe. Over the phone he was prescribed only a standard painkiller and a broad-spectrum antibiotic.

An on-call doctor finally went to see Alessandro on the evening of March 18, but it was too late. When an ambulance arrived, hours after it was called, Alessandro had already been pronounced dead 10 minutes earlier.

Reuters notes that “Interviews with families, doctors and nurses in Italy’s stricken Lombardy region” reveal that “scores are dying at home as symptoms go unchecked... In Bergamo province alone, according to a recent study of death records, the real death toll from the outbreak could be more than double the official tally of 2,060...”

According to one doctor, Riccardo Munda, the fear of infection and even death has led doctors to avoid making the required visits to patients at home who have symptoms. “And I can’t blame them,” he said, “because that’s how they saved their own skin.”

The working class, socialism and the fight against the coronavirus pandemic

BY DAVID NORTH

If prompt medical attention was given to people at home, he added, “many deaths could be avoided,” but “doctors were swamped, lacked enough masks and suits to protect themselves from infection, and were discouraged from making visits unless absolutely necessary.”

In the Bergamo area, 142 doctors were either sick or in quarantine, according to the state-run ATS health agency.

A further 674 died in Spain Sunday, as total deaths rose to 12,418. Total infections rose by more than 6,000 to 130,759.

Last Friday, a further 684 people perished in UK hospitals, as the number of people dead from COVID-19 rose five-fold in a week. An additional 708 deaths were announced Saturday, the biggest one-day rise since the outbreak began. Another 621 patients died Sunday, taking the total to 4,934. Despite talk of the cases plateauing in the UK, Sunday’s 5,903 new cases took the total to 47,806, the largest daily increase so far at 59 percent.

As in every European country, health workers in Britain are dying and suffering horrifically due to years of health service cuts and a lack of basic protective equipment. A tiny proportion of frontline National Health Service (NHS) staff has been tested for the virus, despite thousands self-isolating after being infected. Just 0.3 percent (195,524) of the entire UK’s population of 66 million had been tested by Sunday.

Last Friday, the death of two NHS nurses, Areema Nasreen, 36, and Aimee O’Rourke, 39, was announced. This was followed by the weekend’s news that a 24-year-old nursing assistant, John Alagos, looking after coronavirus patients at Watford General Hospital in Hertfordshire, had died and is being tested for COVID-19.

The *Daily Mail* reported that Alagos “collapsed and died at home after an exhausting 12-hour shift.” The young man “returned home on Friday following a night shift, after complaining of suffering a headache and high temperature throughout the night.”

His mother, Gina Gustilo, said, “I asked [John], ‘Why didn’t you come home?’ He said he had asked other staff, but they said they were short of staff and they did not let him go. I

said, 'OK, take some paracetamol.' After a few minutes, I found him turning blue in his bed."

Lack of adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was no doubt a factor in his death, with Gina revealing she had been told by her son's co-workers that he was not wearing "proper" protective clothing. "They wear PPE, she said, "but not totally protective of the mouth. They wear the normal masks."

Rinesh Parmar, chairman of the Doctors' Association, said, "I worry that if we don't sort out our issues with Personal Protection Equipment and testing of frontline staff in the coming days that we will start to follow a trend that's very similar with Italy. I dread to think how high it could go... I worry it's going to go in excess of 50."

Warnings about the necessity for stockpiling ventilators, PPE and other essential resources were ignored by governments all over Europe, which adopted a slash and burn policy towards public health care in enforcing savage austerity over the past decade. In the UK, barely 5,000 ventilators were in operation when the pandemic began. Despite repeated promises to secure the required amount, Health Secretary Matt Hancock admitted to the BBC Sunday that there may be only 13,500 ventilators in hospitals by Easter, when the government claims COVID-19 is expected to peak.

In Germany, 132 new deaths were recorded Sunday, bringing deaths to 1,576. Previous days saw fatalities at around 140, meaning Sunday's toll was an increase of around 1.5 percent.

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