

Have you ever wondered how emergency blood supplies, donor organs and medical equipment are transported between hospitals? Mike Ney has been volunteering as a Bloodrunner since 2008. Read more about this vital service, and its contribution to the fight against Covid-19, in the latest article in our series “Everyday Neighbours”, in which we share and celebrate some of the acts of service that our parishioners undertake during the week, putting faith into practice for the benefit of our neighbour.

On being a Bloodrunner



NHS Blood and Transplantation have a logistic arm that restocks hospital blood banks every day but they have only a very limited capability at night and on bank holidays. This is where SERV, Service by Emergency Rider Volunteers – often known as Bloodbikers or Bloodrunners – comes in. Different groups cover the whole of the UK. Every night here in Surrey & South London we have a team of around six riders/drivers plus a controller to cover emergency supplies where hospitals have run out of something vital or need samples processed overnight for surgery the following morning or the issue of a particular blood product. In addition, every single night of the year, without fail, we change over the two blood boxes on the air ambulance so they always have fresh blood aboard to transfuse on-scene.

I joined SERV in 2008, after taking my Institute of Advanced Motorists’ test. To start with I was on the night runs, based in our bunkhouse in New Malden. I was then asked to train as a controller and I have been doing that for nearly 10 years. The controller takes the calls from the hospitals and other counties and allocates the riders/drivers with the tasks through the period from 7pm to 6am.

Covid-19 has shut down huge sectors of the economy but the NHS is working 24/7 and that means so is SERV. Although Covid-19 is the disease of the moment, all the ‘normal’ problems such as heart attacks, vehicle collisions and industrial injuries continue. People still need surgical interventions for major diseases or damage and, of course, obstetrics and gynaecology. You can’t tell babies to wait inside for 12 weeks! Hospitals continue to need blood products – blood, platelets, plasma – and to convey patient samples to specialist laboratories, including that of Public Health England at Colindale. Recently, one was transported from Stepping Hill Hospital, Manchester and another from the Royal Shrewsbury, both by a succession of transfers from various county groups of blood bikers. Our longest transfer was from Edinburgh to Great Ormond St and we regularly do runs from Yeovil to the Royal Brompton in London.

We operate in all weathers, the only exception being that we take motorbikes off the run when the temperature drops below 2 °C. We even have an ex-police 4 × 4 to

use in snow, named 'Michael' after the patron saint of policemen. Almost every night we do a bulk run to Hooley on the A23, nicknamed the 'Hooleygan', to supply our colleagues in Kent and Sussex on runs to hospitals in their counties. That is done in a car or in our Citroen C3 van on loan from Charters in Aldershot and funded by the Crimeafest in the Crimea pub, also in Aldershot. All our riders hold additional qualifications, and everyone is trained on NHS good manufacturing procedures and is regularly examined.

In March, we did 330 runs, carrying 94 boxes of blood, 152 boxes of platelets, 1 of plasma and 67 samples. We replenished 114 boxes on the air ambulance and carried 3 'packages'. Destinations included the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel, the Royal Surrey, the Medway Maritime in Gillingham and the Princess Royal in Orpington.

We also collect frozen donor breast milk for St Peter's, Queen Charlotte's and St Thomas' from individual donors. Because of Covid-19 this has been temporarily suspended as it involves collecting from private addresses, which is always done by day and not at night.

SERV SSL is a registered charity. It does not charge nor does it receive any funding from the NHS, the state or any public authority. All our funding is from donations, bequests and support from charitable donors such as Rotary, the Lions Clubs and the Freemasons. See our website (www.servssl.org.uk) or watch the Omeleto film on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/r1ZqkjNsgI>).

Every night, whether it is fair or foul, there will be riders and drivers out there making sure that hospitals have the urgent supplies they need. We may be having the ride of YOUR life. Remember in your prayers the men and women (yes, we have lady bikers, too) who volunteer for no pay or expenses to provide this essential service from Land's End to John O'Groats and in the Republic of Ireland, every night of every year. Some are Christian, some Muslim, some Jewish or of no faith at all but every one is putting something back into the NHS.

Update: on 9th April, my colleague Johnny did a run in conjunction with our colleagues at SERV Herts & Beds. A company called Mologic, based in Bedfordshire, has been working to find possible treatments for Covid-19 in partnership with NHS and St George's Hospital, amongst others around the country. They have been getting samples, processing them and coming up with potential treatments for trials and analysis – all state-of-the-art pioneering work carried out to combat the virus. Johnny's run was to carry an analysis machine to the Medical School at St George's, where one of their professors is working on this treatment.

*Michael Ney
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