

Street dog helps see Chinese nurse through virus traumas

BEIJING (AP) — Zhang Dan was among the first to respond to the call for help in China's coronavirus epicenter. The 36-year-old nurse worked through gruelling days, ministering to patients who needed assistance from breathing to merely eating.

She struggled — but then, a little street dog helped her through.

Zhang was among 42,600 medical workers brought from around China to bolster Wuhan's overwhelmed medical system. Hospitals were crammed with patients and field clinics were thrown up to handle the overflow.

"I can't save the world, but I can try my best with my tiny efforts to do what I can do to help," Zhang said.

Her parents and grandparents worried about her decision to volunteer — and she herself prepared for the worst. She purchased life insurance that would benefit her parents if she succumbed to the illness. Having no children, she figured her husband could start over if she died.

Her husband having returned to his home province for the Lunar New Year holiday, Zhang's mother moved into their apartment in the city of Changchun to look after her plants and four dogs.

Zhang and the rest of her 133-member team had one day of orientation in early February before they were thrown into the fray.



NURSE'S AID. Chinese nurse Zhang Dan poses for a photo while working at the Tongji hospital in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province. Zhang was among the first to respond to the call for help in China's coronavirus epicenter. The 36-year-old nurse worked through gruelling days, ministering to patients who needed assistance from breathing to merely eating. She struggled — but then, a little street dog helped her through. (Zhang Dan via AP)

It took 40 minutes to don the protective gear: four layers of protective gowns and gloves, three layers of shoe covers, two hats, two pairs of masks, goggles, and a face shield. To avoid bathroom breaks, they wore adult diapers so they wouldn't waste time or gear by taking off the layers and having to dispose them.

The work soon extended to providing daily life care for the mostly elderly patients who were without family members to help them. Zhang sang to the patients to try to raise their spirits, and washed their hair and feet.

"We bought food if they needed it, soap, toothpaste, and towels, and medicine when there was a shortage,"

she said.

It was all so overwhelming. And then the pooch came along.

The small, yellowish street dog had caught Zhang's eye during her walks. Always with her tail between her legs, she wolfed down the ham Zhang offered. She named her Doudou, or "bean."

Feeding Doudou became a welcome distraction, and a daily preoccupation. In frigid winter temperatures, she made the dog a vest from part of her scrubs.

By mid-March, teams such as Zhang's were beginning to pack up. Little Doudou was going to need a permanent home. Zhang posted video

Continued on page 11

Virus diary: In Hong Kong lockdown, watched by a wristband

By Zen Soo

The Associated Press

HONG KONG — It took only a few seconds. Shortly after I stepped off a flight from Singapore, an official at the Hong Kong immigration counter gestured for me to extend my arm, then strapped a bulky plastic box to my wrist.

And just like that, I had a new companion for the next 14 days of self-isolation — a government quarantine tracker.

In online pictures, the trackers were inconspicuous devices almost like a concert wristband. Those didn't look so bad. What I got, though, was a gadget about the size of a deck of cards that I had to pair with a government quarantine app. After that, if I left my home or stepped more than 30 feet from my phone for a prolonged period of time, the app would alert authorities that I may have broken quarantine.

The bulky tracker turned out to be a new version released after Hong Kong admitted that only a third of the first-generation wristbands actually worked. The rest simply never activated.

On the taxi ride home, I examined it closely. The tracker hardly looked like a high-tech device meant to keep tabs on me. It was so light that I wondered if maybe it was an empty shell, a cheap fake to trick me into staying put.

I wasn't about to take it off to find out, even though having a tracker branded me as a potential risk to society, at least for two weeks. I found myself trying to hide it when I arrived at my apartment building, afraid others might see and shun me.

Over the next two weeks, I wore the tracker in the shower, while exercising, and of course, to sleep. Sometimes I'd forget about it entirely. At other moments, the constant presence on my wrist was all I could feel, a perpetual reminder that I was a virtual prisoner in my home.

It did make a handy conversation starter. When I showed it off at a friend's Zoom birthday party, many giggled at the size of it. One attendee called it my ankle monitor.

Despite the jokes, I was keenly aware that I was privileged to be in comfortable quarters, unlike some who had to quarantine in Hong Kong's infamous cage homes — regular apartments effectively subdivided into tiny cells.

But being in quarantine also frustrated me. I had to rely on the goodwill of my flatmate to help me buy groceries and the like, and I used food delivery services for most of my meals to avoid having to trouble her.

Sometimes, I'd forget which day of the week it was. When I needed fresh air, I'd stick my head out of the one



MONITORED MOVEMENT. Associated Press reporter Zen Soo pokes her head out the window (top photo) for some fresh air while serving her 14-day quarantine at home in Hong Kong. In the bottom photo, Soo walks along the Quarry Bay Promenade in Hong Kong on her first day of freedom after home quarantine. (AP Photos/Vincent Yu)

window in my living room that wasn't grilled shut, envying people walking freely outside.

Since neither tracker nor app did much to attract attention, it was easy to forget I was under surveillance — at least, until an alert popped up on my iPhone to remind me the app was watching. On the third day of my quarantine, a government official called to check if I was at home. On the 10th day, two uniformed officers came knocking, asking me to show identification to prove I hadn't gone anywhere.

When the clock struck midnight on a Sunday in mid-April, my quarantine was over. Immediately, I snipped off the tracker and tapped the "Finish the quarantine" button in the app before uninstalling it. What a relief.

Just to be sure, though, I got out a hammer and a screwdriver and cracked the tracker open, then removed the small circuit board inside and pulled out its battery. Free at last.

Virus Diary, an occasional feature, showcases the coronavirus saga through the eyes of Associated Press journalists around the world.

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