



14 November 2021 – At 70 years of age, with life getting ever more difficult and food more scarce, an attack of watery diarrhoea was enough to tip Amina into critical condition. In desperation, Rana, the junior wife in their household of 12, brought Amina to the National Infectious Diseases hospital hoping for some help.

And help there was. As soon as Amina arrived, she was assessed as severely dehydrated, and treatment began. “This is the one shining light in a very dark time” said Rana as she stood by Amina’s bedside.

Although none of the staff have been paid for 3 months, the doctors and nurses have been coming every day, simply because, as the hospital director, Dr Asadullah Esmat, said ‘This is our job. We are trained for that. Our staff say to us, ‘No problem, I am working for the people of Afghanistan’

In early September, just a few weeks after the change in political regime, people began arriving at the hospital with acute watery diarrhoea. Numbers climbed quickly, peaking at over 100 people per day. Many people had delayed seeking care, not certain if help would still be available, and arrived severely dehydrated, needing urgent rehydration.

The hospital was already crowded with people needing advanced care for the many infectious diseases challenging the people of Afghanistan – meningitis, tuberculosis, HIV, Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever, COVID-19 to name a few. But it was essential to isolate and treat everyone who had acute watery diarrhoea to save lives.

“We emptied out several wards, discharging those patients who were well enough, putting others in other parts of the hospital, even the corridors. We needed one female and one male isolation ward to comply with the new rules.” said Dr Esmat.

