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Governing an emerging crisis amidst uncertainty; an ethnographic study on the risk governance of the Covid-19 pandemic in an elite academic hospital in the Netherlands.

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The emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic early 2020 has confronted the healthcare sector in the Netherlands and beyond with risks and uncertainties on an unprecedented scale. Often only imagined in historical works and practiced in scenario's organizations throughout the healthcare sector face acute problems, the answers to which have to be provided, and constantly recalibrated, on the fly. In the literature little is known about how these acute problems, especially on the scale of Covid-19, are governed. This is why the Corvid-19 crises provides ethnographers of healthcare with a unique possibility to study risk governance in action.

We have been shadowing the Board of Directors and the unit of infection prevention in an elite academic hospital in the Netherlands from the early moments of the Covid-19 crises in the Netherlands onwards. Using an ethnographic approach, our fieldwork consisted of the observation of (crisis) meetings on the level of the hospital boards, the staff, on a regional and national level. We have collected relevant documents and have interviewed actors on the national level. This approach offers us an important data-set on acute risk governance in practice. Our analysis of this data focuses on the actual practice, as opposed to the scenario's and plans, of the governance of the risks and uncertainties of Covid-19, the effects of these practices and the lessons we might draw for dealing with future pandemics.

Key words: SARS-CoV-2, Covid-19, risk governance, healthcare, the Netherlands

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