

An Editor's Invitation: COVID-19,

Chapter 2

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written by Paul Gross | May 1, 2020

This month's More Voices theme is COVID-19, Chapter 2. Coronavirus is still very much with us, affecting us in ways we couldn't have imagined a few months ago.

I've been doing telemedicine these past weeks. I've had the privilege of accompanying, by phone, a number of my patients who've been doing battle with the virus at home—and to everyone's great relief, most of them have done well.

While COVID tests are gradually becoming more available, in most cases I've made the diagnosis without one. Some of my patients have had the entire menu of symptoms—fever, chills, cough, body aches, sore throat, headache, loss of appetite; others, just a few.

Nearly all have experienced a telltale change in taste or smell. "Food tastes nasty," as one patient told me.

I have a 78-year-old patient who lives alone and whose main symptom was complete exhaustion. She could barely move and was hardly drinking, let alone eating or getting out of bed.

I was alarmed enough to call visiting-nurse services; they were too overwhelmed and short-staffed to come see her. (Many nurses were home sick themselves.)

Luckily, my patient's family and friends braved her illness to bring soup and keep her company.

I called her each day, as a doctor might have made daily home visits two hundred years ago. I had little to offer besides encouragement and the recommendation to sleep on her stomach. (It seems to help respiratory symptoms.)

She made it.

Another patient lost her frail, very elderly mom (who had also been my patient) to the virus, and when I heard the daughter's labored breathing over the phone I feared for her life as well. But despite her own infection, she managed to plan her mother's funeral, which streamed online. This daughter soldiered on and a week later was sounding almost back to normal.

The virus has hit some essential workers particularly hard. A New York City transit worker told a colleague of mine that he'd lost five of his buddies to COVID. That was several weeks ago; now that number is up to eight.

It's hard to imagine what it would be like to lose eight of my colleagues.

It's also hard to imagine having a family member dying from COVID and being unable to comfort them in person, or being that person myself—desperately ill, intubated and separated from the ones I love.

Most COVID-19 victims are still living. They include those who survived the illness, those who are grieving the loss of loved ones, those traumatized by caring for deathly ill COVID patients in a hospital, and those suffering from lost jobs and financial hardship.

We who are not sick with COVID-19 or losing loved ones from the virus are lucky. We're doubly lucky if we're still employed. And triply lucky if we can collect a paycheck from home.

What's your COVID-19, Chapter 2 story? Please tell us.

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