

Racked with Guilt

Category: COVID-19

written by Mimi Emig | April 16, 2020

“Don’t you even *think* of going out in this,” my former colleagues warn me. They’re on the front lines, truly seeing the effects of COVID. I retired from my medical practice five years ago when I developed some serious illnesses. For people like me, this new coronavirus presents a unique threat. I’m used to protecting myself from infection. But this one is different. If I get COVID-19, there’s a high likelihood that I’d die.

Our household has been isolating for a month now. We’ve been getting groceries through “contactless” shopping—curbside pickup or delivery services.

These delivery services were developed before the pandemic. They have names that sound as if they magically make goods appear (Shipt, Instacart, etc.). The reality is that there is a person who is going into a store, sometimes having to stand in line. Is it okay for me to pay someone to shop for me, to be out in public in my place?

Each time I use these services, I am racked with guilt. I am privileged. There are many people with illnesses like mine who cannot afford the extra cost or who live in areas where such services aren’t a choice. The person doing my shopping is trying to earn a living in an economy that has been shut down.

I consolidate my orders to minimize the number of times someone will be out in my place in the community. I include a note in my order that I’m immune compromised and thank my shopper for working for me. I tip heavily for their service, for they are making their living doing this. I offer them surgical masks when they drop off my order.

Am I merely trying to ease my conscience? I don’t know. I am sending someone else out in my place. They are younger, healthier, and lower risk than I. Yet that risk is never zero. Please, I think, let me not be the direct cause of someone else’s suffering or death.

I will need to isolate until there is a vaccine. I’m grateful there are options for me, and that I have the means to afford them. The ethics of this situation, though, will haunt me to my dying day.

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