

Something That Is Certain

Category: Uncertainty

written by Sandhya Chauhan | August 19, 2020

“All of us are overworked, tired, and frustrated, but today it’s only us who can help. This is our call. So be brave and work without complaining.” The chief of our COVID ICU was briefing new staff assigned to the COVID ward before they started their shifts on Monday. I was there as the pediatric COVID consultant on call for the coming week. We were seeing only a small number of infected kids, but the thought of entering the COVID ward wearing full PPE kit was still unsettling. With so many health-care personnel getting infected, admitted, or quarantined every day, nobody knew who would be next.

On Monday, my rounds began. As I went from the first patient—a mildly symptomatic, chubby 1-year-old boy—to the last one—a beautiful 16-year-old girl on mechanical ventilation—I lost track of time and my apprehensions. I did not even realize how much I was sweating inside my PPE, or that I was getting breathless. That’s because my patients and their parents just wanted to talk! Talk about their child’s medical condition, talk about this deadly virus, talk about discharge policies, talk about their lives before their child’s admission, talk about the families they had left behind. A little 4-year-old girl greeted me by saying, “I will always wash my hands and always sneeze into a handkerchief when I get well.” I told her she had done nothing wrong.

From the first parent to the last—even though they couldn’t see my face—as soon as I introduced myself and they heard my voice, the expressions on their faces changed from desperation to expectation. It was as if they knew that no matter how severe the infection was, somebody was there to take care of their child. In that situation of confusion and uncertainty, I as a doctor personified hope. Despite the dangers on that ward, I found myself eager to get to work every day—to talk to my patients and their parents, to touch them, to discuss with them everything from their personal lives to government policies.

It was in this setting that I learned a very important life lesson: Even when there is uncertainty all around us, one thing always remains certain—that each day brings an opportunity to live life to its fullest, even amid uncertainty.

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