

The Tempest

Category: Unvaccinated

written by Anonymous | September 1, 2021

“Saturation” is a word used to describe an overcrowded hospital, where every bed is full, as is every gurney in the emergency department and every waiting room—and there’s a line of ambulances waiting outside to offload still more patients.

“Saturation” also refers to a swelling riverbed, to color devoid of light, and to the cotton-rag-like lungs of someone with COVID pneumonia.

It’s been almost nineteen months since the first case of COVID was declared in the United States. Since then, health-care workers have endured surging cases, periods of eerie calm, more surges, and, now, a hurricane.

For the last thirty days, my hospital has canceled all elective procedures, stopped allowing visitors, and opened numerous overflow units to accommodate a harrowing volume of patients. Over 50% of our facility’s census is COVID-positive, almost all of them unvaccinated. Many plead to be vaccinated now, but it’s far too late for that. They’re all desperate, fearing for their lives.

Meanwhile, people are still having strokes, heart attacks, and getting into car accidents. Behavioral health crises are at an all-time high. Children are returning to school, so respiratory viruses, COVID and otherwise, are in full bloom. Each day, patients flood through our doors, and we find new ways to care for them, all the while losing staff in record numbers to burnout, moral injury—and illness themselves. Four of my colleagues have died of COVID.

We are doing twice—perhaps three times—the work we were doing a year ago, with half the staff and little help from outside sources.

We accept assignments we know are unsafe. We endure insults from patients and their loved ones, from neighbors, from those we thought were friends, even from our own families and some colleagues. They say we are failing, we are sheep for supporting vaccination and infection-control practices like wearing face coverings and social distancing, that this is all a hoax.

We have performed CPR in our hallways and on the floor in our lobbies. There is a refrigerated truck outside because our morgue is overflowing.

And still, we show up.

When I was an undergraduate, a professor once told me she almost drowned as a child after being swept into a rip tide. She spun viciously. Her life vest snapped. She screamed into the current—a ragdoll in the water. She believed she was going to die. She stopped struggling.

At that moment, an odd serenity overtook her, she said. The pain was still there, still unbearable, but there was also peace. She curled inside the

watery womb, probably soon her grave.

Then her father pulled her out.

My city is drowning. This is no longer about best practices or long-term solutions. We are simply doing the best we can with what we have, hour by hour, one patient at a time. I have stopped struggling.

I am waiting for a hand to pull me out.

And I am still showing up.

Anonymous

A frontline health-care worker in Texas