

# Voice from the Frontline

Category: Unvaccinated

written by Jennifer Caputo-Seidler | September 3, 2021

The current COVID surge has been the hardest of all. Like many of my colleagues, I was physically and emotionally spent before it even began. But more than the exhaustion, what's made it so difficult for me is that it didn't have to happen. We have a safe and effective vaccine that's widely available. While vaccinated individuals may still be infected, they make up a small number of people requiring hospitalization and ICU care. In advocating for vaccination, it feels like healthcare workers have become public enemies.

Last summer, patients were so grateful for any care I could provide, even in the face of so much uncertainty. One woman was brought to tears when I held her hand. She told me she could feel my warmth even through my gloves. Another patient told me it was okay if I didn't examine him because he didn't want me to get sick.

This time around, the dynamic with my patients has taken on an adversarial tone. One patient screamed at me to leave his room because I was annoying him as I tried to explain that his illness had become critical. We were preparing to put him on a ventilator because his oxygen levels were dangerously low. Another patient refused to answer any of my questions until "you find a way to get me out of here." That patient also required a ventilator within hours of this conversation due to critically low oxygen levels.

In a moment of despair, I posted on Twitter about what this surge has been like at my hospital. I sent a plea into the Twittersphere for people to get vaccinated. My post went viral. Many reached out with words of support and thanks for the work I was doing. But many also called me a liar, demanded photos or videos as evidence, and accused me of fear-mongering. I did gain widespread support from my colleagues for what I'd written. Many thanked me for giving voice to their experience, one for which they'd been unable to find the words. That was enough for me.

In many ways, COVID and the division it's brought has stolen the joy from practicing medicine. Being a voice for the frontline is my way of reclaiming a piece of that joy.

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