

A Day in Respiratory Clinic: Omicron Version

Category: Omicron

written by Katharine Barnard | January 17, 2022

We start with only two pre-booked patients, a mom and her six-month-old baby, but by forty-five minutes into the morning, the schedule is full. I take my own COVID test (negative) and joke with the medical assistants about how they resemble pregnancy tests. Already wearing scrubs and N95 mask, I suit up with face shield, disposable gown, stethoscope and gloves. I breathe.

The other providers and I have a quick huddle. A year ago, COVID care was fairly simple: rest, isolate, take acetaminophen, and go to the ER if you're short of breath. Get your vaccine when it's available.

Now, it's so much more complicated. Guidelines, and our resources, are changing day to day. Two weeks ago, we were referring for monoclonal antibodies, but now the treatment center is so overwhelmed as to take only the sickest patients. This week, we have anti-COVID medication, just granted federal emergency use authorization. None of us have dispensed the pills before, so we pool our knowledge and the information at our disposal, and agree to support one another.

I breathe and step into the first room to see a young family, COVID-positive and symptomatic. We mostly talk about how to monitor the baby for dehydration and respiratory distress (neither of which he has now, fortunately). Then, a city bus driver, who herself is vaccinated but who lives with her three adult sons who have all declined the vaccine. She worries about their safety. I see a young woman who vows to take her vaccine when she recovers. Next, several members of a multigenerational family, all positive, all in their second round with COVID. In the last room, my long-time patients, a couple and their daughter-in-law. We take a moment to savor the sweetness of seeing each other, even through masks and shields. I dispense the mom my first course of antiviral medication. We all take a breath and hope it will help.

I peel off my layers. Over the course of the morning, I have provided care in five languages. I have cared for a mechanic and a homemaker, a retail worker and a factory worker, a baby and a grandmother. Omicron seems to be everywhere, affecting everyone. People are scared and anxious, but mostly just bone-tired. Blame is not useful. We need grace and kindness. In our own way, we are all just doing our best.

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