

Hurt: A pandemic reflection

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My nose hurts.

It is such a minor thing in the grand scheme of things; however, every time, I wash my face, adjust my glasses, rub the sleep from my eyes, my nose hurts and it makes my heart hurt.

My nose hurts from the N95 mask I wore for far too long this weekend. The mask I wore while encouraging a patient to talk to their family before we put a tube down their throat. The mask I wore while spending hours on the phone trying to find an intensive care unit bed for rapidly deteriorating patients anywhere in the province. The mask I wore while sitting in the emergency room worrying about how to best serve our community in this tiny little corner of paradise. A paradise which has quickly become a living nightmare for healthcare workers.

Healthcare workers are used to being 'othered'. We are the ones who cannot tell you the details about our day, the ones who get stuck in a corner at parties because someone wants to show us their rash, the ones who are expected to be perfect every single day because when we are not, human lives are lost. It is heavy. It is othering. It is a privilege. Then, the pandemic hit.

Eighteen months later, I do not recognise our world anymore. I do not recognise the selfishness, the hatred, the vitriol, the 'wokeness' and the vilification. I am othered in an entirely new way, referred to as a government pawn, in the pocket of big pharma, a

terrible person. How did we get to a place where people no longer care about causing harm to another? When did the right to freedom of choice trump the right to safety? My entire career is oriented around helping those around me, helping to keep people safe and well. When did that become what makes me 'other'? My heart hurts.

While some have worked in pandemics before, there has never been a collective global pandemic of this magnitude during any of our careers. There is not a course in medical school called 'How to navigate a healthcare system through a pandemic'. I have been scared plenty of times during my career (the first time, I broke someone's ribs doing chest compressions comes to mind, among many others). I have never been terrified OF my patients as well as FOR them before. However, I chose this career when I was 13 years old. Hence, I updated my will, put on my mask and went to work. I got vaccinated, cried tears of thanks, put on my mask and went back to work. I stayed away from family and friends in case I contracted COVID at work, put on my mask and kept working. It was not enough. I was not enough.

My heart hurts. My nose hurts.

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