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7:00 PM: A Time for Gratitude and Reflection



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WALKING DOWN THE SIDEWALK AFTER A MEDICINE shift, a whistling bystander noticed my unmistakable navy blue and white hospital ID hanging from the lanyard around my neck. He gestured above to the clanging pots and pans, cheers, and Frank Sinatra emanating from overhead windows and fire escapes. The blaring sirens and honking horns were for a different reason these days. “We’re doing this for you!” he said, referring to the overwhelming support the New York City community has habitually shown each evening at 7:00 PM. I instinctively looked up, saw the excited faces and heartfelt messages on homemade signs, and felt uncomfortable as my impostor syndrome flared up. I thought to myself, “I don’t deserve this. Sure, I’ve donned and doffed, seen countless COVID-19 positive patients, and temporarily paused my ophthalmology brain to join my medicine colleagues, but we were all doing unexpected duties, and there were countless workers, both medical and nonmedical, accomplishing more meaningful tasks who were more deserving of appreciation. After all, I signed up for this. To single me out just because I did my job as an ophthalmology resident or as a voluntary intern on the floors did not seem justified.” Still, I sheepishly smiled under my surgical mask and half-waved to him, acknowledging his gratitude.

I thought about the families expectantly waiting for my daily phone calls, only allowing 10 or 15 minutes to connect with their loved ones. I could not fathom how they expressed their appreciation and somehow worried about my safety and health even when I delivered less than ideal news about increasing oxygen requirements and continued poor mental status. Especially as an ophthalmology resident, I wondered whether my medical knowledge remained sufficient to effectively manage these patients’ complex needs. I did not feel worthy of praises, but reflecting on my interactions with patients’ families reminded me of the significance of working as a physician.

My story is not unique. I am sure that I am not alone in my feelings of inadequacy at this unprecedented time. Caring for New York City patients during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown me how not only the medical community but also the general public can come together and share a common experience. I am proud of my fellow community members, and I applaud my colleagues across the world for forging new interdisciplinary relationships, breaking out of their comfort zones, and rising up to overcome extraordinary challenges. I hope that we continue to work collaboratively and fight together for the betterment of our patients and the community at large.

THE AUTHOR ATTESTS THAT SHE MEETS THE CURRENT ICMJE CRITERIA FOR AUTHORSHIP.

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