

# Magic Number Four

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ethics, epidemiology, health policy, socioeconomic, laboratory tests, diagnostic modalities, poetry, narrative medicine

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These are poems about 2020 and the long drives we took to escape the dread. Will we survive?

Only time, whatever that may be, will tell.

Someone recently asked, “how is the time travel going?” Well, not so well.

Will we reach the other side of these Normandy shores? And what of freedom?

Will we get there? How’s the time travel going? Not so well.

This is a poem about 2020 and the Astros’ magic number is four.

This one’s a trap. And you’re going to have to fight your way out.

Like walking into an Astros bar only to find the Rangers on.

This one’s a trap and these are 2020 poems.

A turning point in a battle and a possum kingdom behind the walls.

Justin Fields will start Sunday against the Broncos. This is a trap and you should get out now.

Like arriving at a party and the guest of honor is gone.

Take a seat somewhere where you can still see the door.

This is a trap and the Astros’ magic number is four.

In March of 2020, the HSS in New York City, a boutique hospital, suspended operations and converted its facilities to deal with a pandemic outbreak of an illness.

In March of 2020, HSS froze elective surgeries and the hospital’s first patient infected by SARS-CoV-2 was wheeled in on a gurney.

Welcome to the suck. Where over the next five weeks, 148 patients would be treated for the same.

This time, though, the hospital, usually a haven for the sick, this time the hospital is a trap.

The virus will get worse for each moment you spend at the Red Cross.

The virus will get worse for each moment in the suck. Ten souls won’t make it out at all.

Clinicians were reportedly enrolling patients in expanded programs for remdesivir and convalescent plasma. There was a rapid increase in molecular lab testing. Did I mention this was a trap?

Have you ever encountered quicksand? Clinical outcomes defined by invasive mechanical ventilation and cardiovascular complications from kidney failure.

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Most common presenting symptoms: fever, fatigue, and shortness of breath. Diarrhea and cough.

Comorbidities include diabetes, hypertension, and lipidemia. Who knows what that means?

It means high cholesterol. Are you still with me?

You take a piece of me with you every time you go away.

148 patients admitted to the HSS encountering symptoms of a novel respiratory infection surging into New York City.

In the spring of 2020, a novel respiratory infection surging into New York City necessitated broad redeployment of clinical staff into unfamiliar roles.

Is this a wave or a tidal wave? HSS providing capacity overflow for New York-Presbyterian overcome by the flood.

Each day 1,000 more souls dead.

Tough times for tough people. The more patients they gurney into the hospital, the quicker the virus spreads.

Not every wave is a tidal wave, but have you ever encountered quicksand?

This one's more like a blowout on an oil rig.

What of the efficacies of telehealth treatments? Could it be?

Public interest in knee replacement during a pandemic seems vaguely inane.

By summer more half a million souls passed on, my cousin Tony among the dead.

Telerehabilitation functional mobility determines. Catch your breath. Let me. Catch mine. Do you see?

Therapists volunteered to treat patients at risk to themselves and their families.

Therapists were assigned teams and Zoom appointments. Limitations of this study include its retrospective design and the lack of standardized outcome measurements.

Algorithms used to be used to rank universities, chess players, and search results.

These days the HSS uses an algorithm to determine which patients can go home. For telemedicine.

This retrospective suggests. The use of inpatient telemedicine allowed for the reduction of staff exposure and the preservation of PPE.

While providing resources to patients.

Michael Corleone calls his brother Sonny from his father's hospital bed.

"There's no one here." "Don't panic." "I won't panic!" Michael says.

The goal is to stay out of the hospital. The objective is to breathe.

Like walking into an Astros bar only to be confronted by the police.

Aledmys Diaz has three RBIs by the Pacific Ocean shores.

The Astros win 10 to 5. Their magic number is four.

Will we reach the other side of these Normandy waves? To say what of freedom?

Will we get there eventually? We are still living in 2020, a year which could last 100 years.

For the record, some people are cold and this was merely an exercise in population control.

Black people have always suffered most. When the night falls, I feel like I'm losing myself.

The 2020 pandemic continues to burn and this was a public service announcement as the world turns.

### Editors' Note

This original poem composed by B. S. W. Sparks was submitted from a collection called *Poems About 2020*. "Magic Number Four" chronicles the outbreak of COVID-19 in New York City during the spring of 2020 and the heroic response by the medical

community to an unprecedented strain on hospital resources and personnel. We received this poem in response to a special issue of *HSS Journal*, "Response to COVID-19," guest edited by C. Ronald MacKenzie and published in November 2020: [https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/hssa/16/1\\_suppl](https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/hssa/16/1_suppl).

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**Human/Animal Rights**

All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation

(institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2013.

**Informed Consent**

Informed consent was not required for this poem.

**Required Author Forms**

Disclosure forms provided by the author are available with the online version of this poem as supplemental material.

**Supplemental Material**

An audio of the author reading the poem is available online as supplemental material for this article.