

What Health-care Professionals do Matters

The following letter was written by ONA member and social worker Jenn Gosselin. Read how it came to be in the summer issue of Front Lines (page 24) at ona.org/summer.

The pandemic started three months ago. Prior to COVID-19, my routine included: meeting with my daughter and her family for dinner weekly; socializing at my local seniors' club; going to the YMCA for an exercise class twice weekly; going with my daughter for groceries when I needed to; and meeting with some old friends for coffee three to four times a week in the morning.

When the lockdown for COVID-19 started, my whole life changed. I was told I should no longer leave my home as I was in a vulnerable age group. It was recommended that I leave the house for essential services only, which meant that I could no longer participate in the activities I named above. My daughter was no longer able to visit me because she was working as a personal support worker and did not feel comfortable visiting me due to the risk of exposing me to the virus. I was no longer able to meet with my friends and extended family. That basically left me alone at home. My new life mainly consisted of me watching the horrible news about COVID-19, which made me feel afraid.

It didn't take long before doing nothing but watching TV became my new routine and I noticed that the things I used to do with ease started to become more difficult. Before I knew it, I was found on the floor. I was brought to the hospital and diagnosed with a hip fracture. I required surgery and had an acute stay in the hospital. The team felt that I would benefit from a rehabilitation stay.

When I got to the rehabilitation centre, I had a lot of fears and concerns about my new normal. I had a new hip and couldn't do some of the simplest tasks that I used to do, like get out of my bed, use the toilet on my own or walk any distance. This made me reflect on what my quality of life moving forward would look like. My biggest fear was not being able to go back to my family home that I had lived in for 49 years. To get into my home, I would need to walk, I would need to navigate stairs, I would need to be able to get into my car and get my groceries. They told me at the rehab hospital that I would be working with a physiotherapy team to get my leg going again. I saw my physiotherapist and my rehabilitation assistant every day during my stay at the rehab centre. We exercised and worked daily until I met my goal. I was able to walk, do stairs and get into a vehicle, which meant that I got to go home. What the physiotherapist and rehabilitation assistant did with me mattered...

The pandemic brought forward fears and concerns I had never put much thought into before. I started to think about my own mortality. I reflected on my own values, wishes and beliefs and had to start thinking about what I would want should this terrible virus find me. I could not fathom a life in which I could not spend time with the people I love the most, including my daughter and grandchildren. I was also very scared about what would happen if I didn't recover and couldn't go back to my home...where would I go? Was there help out there for me? I was socially isolated and due to restrictions, was unable to have

visitors for the majority of my stay. I felt lonely, scared and sad. I noticed that this sadness was becoming a norm. I needed someone to talk to. They told me there was a social worker that would come and visit me. I was able to share my fears and concerns with the social worker and talk about my low mood. It helped. I didn't feel as alone. What the social worker did with me mattered...

I realized when I got to the rehabilitation centre that I had been in a hospital gown for some time. I wanted to get back to a place where I was able to dress in my own clothes again. I also realized there were many other activities that I wanted to be able to do on my own after this. I wanted to use a toilet, I wanted to clean myself, I wanted to dress myself independently and do my own laundry. Most importantly, I wanted to get back to cooking and baking goodies with my grandchildren by the Christmas holidays. My occupational therapist and my rehabilitation assistant listened to the things that were important to me and worked with me daily until I was able to independently do things that I wanted to do. What the occupational therapist and rehabilitation assistant did with me mattered...

During the pandemic, I lost 20 pounds. I didn't have the help I used to, and cooking meals became difficult. Since I had lost the weight, I felt weaker. The weaker I became, the less motivated I was to cook. In the past, I had large family meals with my daughter and grandchildren once a week; it was an incentive for me to make large healthy meals. But since I was alone, I didn't see the point in making meals for myself. It was easier to grab quick snacks or microwave frozen meals. During the hospitalization for my broken hip, it was pointed out to me that my lab values were off scale and my nutrition was part of the reason. They told me there was a dietitian that could help me get back on track. The dietitian came in my room and listened to me, learned about my eating habits and educated me. What the dietitian did with me mattered.

Throughout my admission, I was so lonely, I missed my family. I saw on TV that some people were using technology to keep in touch. I didn't have that technology at home. I was bored. I lived a socially engaged life previously. I had hobbies such as knitting, bocce and painting. I had not been able to do these activities for months, which was impacting my mood and well-being. They told me there was a recreational therapist that could help connect me to my family with an iPad. The recreation therapist also gave me activities that I liked to do in my room. Seeing my family and participating in activities helped increase my mood and overall well-being. What the recreation therapist did with me mattered...

This is not a real story. This is not a real person. What this story reflects is an accumulation of experiences that we see daily within our workplace. This story has been made to draw attention to the health-care professionals who were and still are working shoulder to shoulder on the front line with other essential team members in the health care setting.

A few months ago, ONA paramedical unionized health-care professionals carried out a rally in Sudbury to raise awareness of our disclusion in the pandemic pay criteria set out by the Ford government. The paramedical team also wished to bring forward our

concerns with Bill 195 and Bill 124, which was passed by the Ford government, and interferes with our collective bargaining rights and imposes wage restrictions. The Ford government has sent a strong message that devalues our professions as well as our professional health and safety, and existence. As ONA members, 68,000 health-care professionals and nurses, we believe the Ford government feels that we are expendable. Furthermore, that the health and safety of our patients and residents is expendable.

The reality is, if the person sharing her experience in the above story would not have received care from all the different members of the health-care team, she would not have been able to resume her normal way of life at home. There are many more untold COVID-19 stories that go beyond Code Blues and ventilators. COVID-19 is unique in that it not only affects those who have been infected by the disease, it has indirectly changed the way of life for most of the population. On top of the work being done by health-care professionals directly with patients with COVID-19, we continue to work with people that are suffering from the indirect effects of COVID-19, including frailty, depression, anxiety and isolation.

Health-care professionals are simply asking the Ontario government, our employers and the public to recognize, respect and support the forgotten team members of the health-care continuum. While health-care professionals are not necessarily adding years to a patient's life, we are striving to add life to the years of our patients every day.

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