



When Angels wore Blue.....” (An experience - Caring for Critically ill COVID-19 Patients)

Anjali.V^{1*}, S Gita², Amita Devrani³

¹MSc Nursing Student, College of Nursing, AFMC, Pune, MS, India

²Professor, College of Nursing, AFMC, Pune, MS, India

³Principal cum Professor, College of Nursing, AFMC, Pune, MS, India



ABSTRACT

Florence Nightingale, the pioneer of modern nursing, revolutionized nursing through her devotion and modernized hospital care during the Crimean war. Through her utmost devotion for the soldiers, she taught that “wise and humane management of the patients is the best safeguard against infection.”

To commemorate the bicentennial year of Florence Nightingale, WHO declared 2020 as “The year of Nurse and Midwife Nightingale continues to motivate all the nurses with her one dedication and innovation. Her age old wisdom of hospital administration and patient care has stood the test of time the more relevant today. Her motivation has been instrumental in our approach to fight against COVID-19 treatment with confidence and optimism from the lessons learnt from her life and her Nurses Notes.

I would like to share my experience as a “front line warrior”. A warrior in a war, fights against enemy whereas here the fight is against a deadly invisible (COVID - 19 virus) which has created havoc all over the globe.

KEYWORDS

COVID19, Patients, Warriors

Date Received: 12/05/2020

Date Revised: 13/05/2020
© Greentree Group Publishers

Date Published: 15/05/2020



INTRODUCTION

Like in conventional war, the preparation for dealing with the enemy starts weeks before the preparation for dealing with COVID-19 cases started weeks prior to the actual reception of COVID cases. I attended various training sessions of Donning and Doffing PPE(Personal Protective Equipment), precaution caring for patient and CARP Protocol (COVID Repositioning/Proning Protocol). Like a well-trained soldier, I was well prepared to deal with the enemy physically and mentally.

THE DAY

On 17th April, 2020 at 1600 hrs, when the D-Day arrived, I got a call advising me to proceed for duty in COVID ICU the next morning. There was no fear in me as my colleagues had shared their experiences of caring for COVID patients and I was mentally prepared. We had to practice social distancing and so I prepared myself to stay away from family and friends. I had to stay in isolation for 21 long days with minimum articles in the quarantine block.

I informed my father about the special task assigned to me, to take care of COVID- 19 patients in COVID ICU. He tried to motivate me by saying that “You are the chosen one for this, do your best. I know you are a bit scared but try not to display your emotions through words or body language and maintain a pleasant face in the presence of patients.

But little did he know that after donning PPE and the N95 mask on my face, my emotions were masked from my patients and co workers.

Remembering the Nightingale pledge which I took when I started my career, I felt this was my “Call for action”, a once in a lifetime experience and this too will pass soon.....

The D-Day began. I along with my other healthcare team members started our journey to fight against our invisible enemy in a special transport. All were quiet and did not speak much on the way. Long empty roads made me understand the gravity of the situation. Bygone were the days that used to start up with a routine good morning. Now my shifts used to begin with a temperature check with Infrared thermometer and enquiry about any symptoms like fever, sore throat at the reception. The PPE kits were provided from the counter at the reception. Disposable scrub dress was given. I could feel how dangerous this tiny species is which has made the most dominant species of this universe bow down on its knee.



I hydrated well, because I knew that I will not be able to consume any food or get a sip of water for another 8 hours after donning PPE .Shift timing was 8 hours , but it usually became almost 10 hours without consuming anything, as Donning -Doffing procedure was a daunting and herculian task. Very often I would become totally dehydrated by the end of the shift with a dry mouth and a throbbing headache. Many times I had to control the pain of full bladder for hours together, waiting for the shift to end.

Even though I had attended multiple training sessions of donning PPE, I was confused what to wear first, as it happens when you go to perform on stage even after multiple rehearsal sessions. Still I was calm and composed. Finally donned the PPE after multiple trial and error and checked from my head to toe to confirm that PPE is worn properly. I could hardly recognise myself and was sweating profusely inside the PPE. I consoled myself, after donning PPE;I was sweating because of the high temperature outside and not because of the fear within me.

The staff at the reception directed me to the ICU. It was a long corridor at the end of which there was a flashing light. He pointed towards it and said “ That is COVID ICU”. When I walked along the corridor towards the COVID ICU all alone, fully covered from head to toe with no space for even air to enter inside, I felt like an astronaut inside a spaceship. Multiple thoughts flashed through my mind .There is a fine line “where you want to be able to put your life in fire and protect others, but at the same time you know that it will burn you as well”.

I took care of two elderly COVID patients in the ICU, who were also having multiple comorbidities which aggravated the COVID infection. With grief I would like to mention that both patients succumbed to death. Witnessing the two patients dying in front of me , made me feel miserable. My soul was depleted and left a lacuna in my heart. We did our best to save their lives. But inspite of all the efforts humanly possible, the boatmen sent by God was waiting for them.

THE EXPERIENCE

As this experience of caring for COVID-19 patients was new, we put our nursing skills and critical thinking to the best of use to achieve maximum success. The COVID cases are rocketing, but we know 80% of cases get through the other side. Ventilators may be life saving, but most patients still die. Death here has got no dearth.



I recall standing beside the patient when she was in severe respiratory distress. The lady was scared and kept repeating the question: “will I survive?” I assured her I will do everything possible to save her. She kept holding my hands with the hope that I am her savior. Her eyes were full of fear and pain. But I was helpless in the hands of the unseen enemy. I will never forget her face.

In no time, her heart rate dropped and she was gasping. She just grabbed my hand for help and I kept on consoling her, knowing that she is not going to survive. I could see the fear in her eyes and it was heartbreaking. The saddest part is, we could not do anything to make her talk to her son, which she asked for, the previous day. We could not reach the family members. This incident has left a permanent scar in my mind which is unlikely to fade forever.

The family members also had to undergo a mental and emotional trauma, as the dead body of the patient was not handed over to them. The last rites of COVID dead patient was tedious and time consuming as there was a high chance of transmitting infections to others. After packing of the body, the dear ones could barely see the face of the patient through the transparent layer. It was the most excruciating experience for them and for me as well.

When you get back after your duty extremely tired, thirsty and hungry, you finally take a breath and that is when you let all your feelings and emotions out.

CONCLUSION

With the number of COVID patients growing exponentially, we may discover that this is the most difficult job any of us has ever performed. Worse times can be anticipated in the near future but our commitment and sincerity will overcome this obstacle and save precious lives.

Resilience, compassion and hope are the need of the hour. I would continue to render my service with compassion, love and dedication.

“Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu”

