FROM THE INSIDE

We are proud of you Jamie

Elie Azoulay^{1*} and Maurizio Cecconi^{2,3}

© 2021 Springer-Verlag GmbH Germany, part of Springer Nature

Dear Jamie,

I returned home yesterday. Thank you so much for your call; my wife and I were very happy to receive good news about the team. It's been three months since I left the intensive care unit (ICU). I'm still weak but more optimistic. Being home and able to read and write is a miracle.

The pain in my right shoulder and elbow is more livable. I can swallow and eat normally and the tracheotomy scar has almost disappeared. Although I lost 21 kg and my legs are stiff and painful, I wouldn't say my main problem is physical. The nightmares and panic attacks are worse. This rampant fear of being abandoned is totally absurd, since my wife Mary has been with me continuously since the first day. Mary is exhausted, even devastated, by the ordeal. Our family doctor, told us she has severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The truth is she often has flashbacks of ICU noises or smells. It's even worse for her than for me. She's still on sick leave. I've started a rehabilitation program and see a nutritionist.

Jamie, I will always remember the day you came to my room and asked to speak with me. I'd been moved to the ward admitting the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)-affected patients and was surprised to see you there, as I'd first got to know you as a cardiology nurse where I was admitted for an irregular heartbeat. My first COVID-19 test was negative. Six days later I started having a fever with fatigue and muscle pains, so I was tested again: it was positive. You came and sat down in front of me. I could feel you trembling and sweating under the protective equipment. When I was in cardiology, we'd talked a lot about my heart disease, my family, and my life. But we also spoke about you, about doing clinical work in such

difficult times. The masks and the distancing didn't prevent us from having great relationship. You really helped me to become confident about my outcome and, in turn, to reassure my family. This time I didn't recognize your voice. That was scary. You'd come to let me know you'd probably passed the COVID-19 virus on to me, since you started having symptoms two days after I was admitted. You told me you hadn't had the vaccine because you weren't sure it was safe for you.

You realized you'd been biased by rumors and social media disinformation instead of relying on objective science. Thousands of people received the vaccine and were thoroughly evaluated in studies. Millions then received it. But you believed at the time that COVID-19 was no big deal for young people like you and your family and that the personal protective equipment would prevent patients from catching the virus from you. Getting vaccinated seemed just one more altruistic effort being asked of you on top of all the overwork and disruption to personal life brought on by the pandemic. But then real life made you aware that, however, good the protection, the risk is never zero. My wife and I went through incomprehension, then sadness, and finally anger. But the anger was not directed to you. I remember the day I had to go to the ICU, because my blood oxygen was getting dangerously low. Mary and you were crying in the corridor. I was terrified. A few days later, I was put to sleep to have the tube placed in my throat for the ventilator. I had to be put face down on the bed. I got two infections. The membranes in my lungs were so damaged that I needed that artificial lung they call ECMO. I spent 48 days hooked up to the ventilator. I needed a tracheostomy. My muscles melted away. I could have died several times.

I guess the feelings we have toward you, Jamie, come from two things. One is the amount of courage it must have taken for you to come and look me straight in the eye and say 'What you went through is because of me. My hat off to you. The other is gratitude—the awareness that so many people on the ICU team stuck with me through

*Correspondence: elie.azoulay@aphp.fr

¹ Médecine Intensive et Réanimation, APHP, Hôpital Saint-Louis, Université de Paris, 1 Avenue Claude Vellefaux, 75010 Paris, France
Full author information is available at the end of the article

thick and thin, pulled me through this complication and then that one, bathed me in competency and kindness for week after week after week. Healthcare workers save lives—you'd think that's already pretty good, right? And yet that's not all they do: their respect for their patients is unlimited. They draw on their compassion, their understanding, their willingness to build their empathy, for their patients and also the families. You, Jamie, you are a healthcare worker and among the best, in skills and in heart.

The other side of my gratitude, of Mary's gratitude, is our growing awareness that our society does not give healthcare workers the respect they are due. Nurses and nursing assistants, particularly, should be paid in a manner commensurate to their skill, compassion, and dedication. Their time and passion deserve to be recognized not only in words but also in quality of life, that is, in better pay and better working conditions. More than a year into the pandemic that lesson has not yet been learned by our society. It's shameful.

As you pointed out Jamie, one of the principles that guide healthcare workers is "do no harm." And doing no harm, right now, means to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

We're proud of you Jamie. Proud that you came to tell us what happened. Proud that after having COVID-19

you got a vaccine shot to further boost your immunity to protect yourself, your family and friends, and your patients. We're proud that you are tirelessly recounting your experience to convince your colleagues—well, everyone, really!—to get vaccinated.

Thank you.

Author details

¹ Médecine Intensive et Réanimation, APHP, Hôpital Saint-Louis, Université de Paris, 1 Avenue Claude Vellefaux, 75010 Paris, France. ² Department of Biomedical Sciences, Humanitas University, Pieve Emanuele, Milan, Italy. ³ Department of Anaesthesia and Intensive Care, IRCCS Humanitas Research Hospital, Rozzano, Milan, Italy.

Declarations

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Received: 27 August 2021 Accepted: 25 October 2021

Published online: 3 January 2022