

ICU PHYSICIAN AND PATIENT ADVOCATE

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My Role: I'm a physician, dual-board certified in emergency and critical care medicine, and work in the ICU at NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln. I'm a new attending with a supportive team who have encouraged me to help prepare the department for this pandemic.

We stay informed of the latest effective treatments, which is why we started a proning process - essentially placing patients on mechanical ventilation face down to help with oxygen. It has shown to have good outcomes with patients.

Impact of COVID-19: Usually, critically ill patients make up a small percentage of patients in the hospital. There's an increase in these cases, and now intensivists in hospitals across the city and nation are stretched to their limits. Our colleagues from the Department of Medicine, Surgery and Anesthesia have stepped up to fill-in, and it's very noble of them.

Other ICU physicians and I treat patients while supporting physicians who are not trained in critical care but still came to help. It's amazing to see our team care for patients in an atypical environment, and to do it so quickly. Some of them have never had exposure to such critically ill patients.

I'm also now the Primary Investigator for a clinical trial using Remdesivir, an antiviral medication, initially created to treat Ebola, which has shown some promise against Coronavirus.

Why I'm on the frontlines: I always wanted to be a physician. Medicine is beautiful in the sense that you're helping people, and I probably feel that way because of my mother. She worked as an OB/GYN in Croatia before moving to the United States, and when she came here she basically had to study all over again. She persisted through the hard work because it was a calling and her dream. She never gave up.



That persistence definitely influenced me to become aggressive in providing care for my patients. I think of myself as an advocate. Every patient is my family member, and I don't settle for anything that doesn't make them better. It's easy to let a disease take its course, but we have to be aggressive. We have to be innovative to beat this.

Managing Stress: I'm here usually for 12 hours a day and 6 days a week, so destressing outside of work is limited. I've moved into a hotel in Midtown Manhattan with other clinicians, so that I don't possibly expose my friends and family to COVID-19. I have video calls with my parents and grandparents. They usually talk about Coronavirus, so we exchange updates. They tell me what they hear in the news and also how the rest of my family is doing.