



When COVID-19 strikes home

My personal story

THE pandemic's impact on frontline caregivers has captured headlines and hearts for months. I read as many as I can to understand how others manage it all, because six members of my family contracted COVID-19.

My journey began in April 2020 when one of my sisters, who's an RN, tested positive. She had symptoms for several days, returned to work after the quarantine period, and was among the first healthcare workers to get vaccinated. Her daughter, who teaches elementary school, tested positive and had to eliminate contact with her students for several months.

But the story gets worse. My 98-year-old mother has lived with one of my sisters and her husband for 30 years. Days before they tested positive, they moved her into a senior residential care facility so she could receive more consistent care for several challenging conditions. My mother received one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine but tested positive a few days later and was isolated in her room to protect other residents. A week later, she was admitted to the COVID-19 ICU at a local hospital with pneumonia and other virus complications. I wasn't able to see her in person, and she passed away on one of her favorite holidays, Mardi Gras. My last words with her were via Zoom.

My own COVID-19 challenges aren't the result of a "super spreader" family event, but from the day-to-day work that characterizes the commitment of nurses, teachers, and caregivers. Similar to many of you, I've felt the kaleidoscope of fears, tears, and concerns as we tried to meet the uncertainties of how the virus will affect our short- and long-term health and careers. How will we ensure that other family members stay safe? With two nurses in the family, we try to balance the issues we face at work with the issues we face taking care of our families, hoping and praying no one else gets sick.

My family's story didn't have to happen to make me appreciate and respect what every nurse has been experiencing for more than a year, but it has certainly increased my empathy level. To all of the nursing heroes on the frontline who made a difference caring for my family, in the words of my mother, "I am eternally grateful." I miss her so much.

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My brother is a sports official who tested positive after coming in contact with a team of several players who tested positive. He managed his symptoms and stayed in quarantine. His situation was complicated by a cancer diagnosis, and he can't get vaccinated for at least a year.

Then another sister and her husband contracted the virus. My brother-in-law is a home health occupational therapist. We suspect he became infected by one of his patients and passed it to my sister. My sister, who's a teacher, taught remotely for quite some time. Both eventually returned to work.

The family stress was over the top, and we were praying that family infections would

For insights into caring for yourself and others, read "Caring during COVID-19" at myamericannurse.com/caring-during-covid19/.