

## A FRONTLINE WARRIOR

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Waking up to the alarm clock and a quick get-ready session was all normal, but things following the usual ones were NEW-NORMAL.

I was Rushing through the corridors of Khyber Teaching Hospital after 20 minutes of smooth road travel as I needed to reach the old casualty block for the 8:00 am shift. There it is- The Isolation Unit. Let's mask up in the three-layered stifling PPE. Suddenly, a thought crosses over the mind 'Stay safest'. My Happy lark! I knew while I left those protective boundaries of home; there was somebody praying for me back there.

Freaked out with the sight of reflecting face shields, unconscious bodies, the cacophony of coughing, no chatter but beeping monitors over the rhythmic hiss of pressured air, the displayed alarming vitals, the balancing fluids, and "US"-the front-liners.

There was one that drew my attention repeatedly because of the red-alert monitor beep. High-grade fever, non-invasively ventilated, low blood pressure, low oxygen saturation, dropping outputs, VERY CRITICAL, I documented.

Consultant visiting, round being conducted, close eye on every monitor, adjusting anaesthesia, suctioning the secretions out, checking the blood gases, monitoring the urine outputs, balancing the fluids, adjusting pillows, moving them prone, counselling family, updating on-call consultants, informing administration, and repeating the same.

I worked the hardest I could. Delaying toilet breaks, avoid sipping water either, skipping meals, and missing naps for the ones I never knew before, neither did they had any idea about me.

I had that very habit of reading before I sleep every night, this piece was entitled as 'Some of us will die'.

In an ideal world, physicians would be using PPE routinely and testing patients immediately but lack of access puts all health care professionals at risk. And while the exact virulence of the disease is not known some will become critically ill and DIE.

It's weird, the feeling that your job could take your life.

We as medical students were always taught to put patients first and I continue to do so even now. We

have forsaken ourselves at so many levels that we have to suffer the burnt-out at higher rates than any other profession.

Add up the untoward load and perks of the 2020 pandemic, a physician taught to put the patient first is now under even more pressure than ever before in life. This is a struggle we deal with daily nowadays. Just like everyone else, we have difficulties in processing the new post-pandemic realities apart from the workplace at homes and with families.

While we are supposed to be on toes, serve more, be sympathetic, show more responsibility, be selfless, we meanwhile do have fear, anxieties, sadness, concerns, reservations, immense feelings that seem to come out of nowhere like a tidal wave and scare us. We choke them down to do our jobs- The service to humanity.

The VERY CRITICAL monitor beeping- impending arrest. Video-called with family, prayers said, his daughter ripping apart, tears dropped, my trembling hand moving to ionotropic support, treatment stopped, infusion withdrawn, ventilator turned off, wait, thinking about the family while I am a daughter myself, standing by, waiting. This is clearly not what I used to do. BEEEEEEEEEP disturbing ears and tearing apart my heart. Lifelines straightened. Choked my feelings. Time of death: 3:00 p.m.

The Walking out, mask off, the same corridor but exhausted to every bit and piece. Reaching home and running to a hot shower before letting anyone come close. Rinse, wash, disinfect. This isn't what I used to do. The NEW-NORMAL was testing us hard. Looking into the mirror, tidal waves of emotions set in, CHOKED them but made sure I remember one thing:

If I can stop one heart from breaking,

I shall not live in vain.

If I can ease one life the aching,

Or cool one pain,

Or help one fainting robin,

I shall not live in vain!