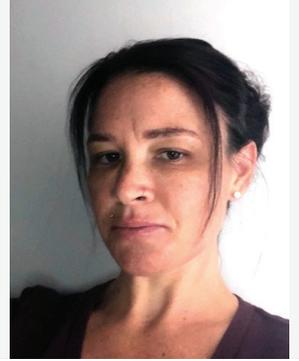




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MEET KRISTA PANELLA



Healthcare workers around the globe are doing it every day right now, sometimes without even thinking about it. Healthcare professionals in hospitals, doctors' offices, and clinics are putting the health and well-being of others ahead of their own. Krista, a nurse at a Pennsylvania hospital, has been putting this mantra into practice for the past 15 years.

Krista's inspiration to become a nurse centers around her desire to help people get well. She has always been drawn to caring for others, and she began her nursing career in the mental health field after seeing the struggle and the impact that addiction had on the lives of her relatives. That personal experience drove her to seek a career where she could help people make meaningful changes in their lives.

For the past 10 years, Krista has worked in the emergency department of a hospital in Pennsylvania. The job comes with a unique set of rewards, responsibilities, and challenges. She enjoys the fast-paced nature of emergency medicine and the tremendous impact she can have on the patients she sees. Being able to quickly assess the symptoms of a particular patient and immediately react to the situation, is both a fascinating and fulfilling experience for her.

Over the past several months, Krista has treated

several patients with confirmed and suspected cases of COVID-19. Some of the patients she has treated have been in serious condition with a variety of different symptoms, including cough, fever, and debilitating headaches. Many of these patients were healthy individuals just a day before. Patients have described the effects of the coronavirus like a semi-truck hitting them from out of nowhere.

Like other healthcare workers fighting the COVID-19 battle, Krista faces challenges related to accessing supplies like personal protective equipment. She takes extra precaution to protect herself while still caring for patients because that's what she signed up to do.

For Krista, the experience of working as a nurse during the COVID-19 pandemic has been both difficult and rewarding at the same time. Due to the highly contagious nature of the virus, the hospital has restricted its visitation policy for inpatients, which is putting added stress on both patients and their family members.

Krista recalls one particular COVID-19 case where a patient was admitted to the hospital, then spent two weeks in the intensive care unit before making a full recovery. The family members were so grateful for the care provided by the emergency department staff that they sent them food. The

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patient also called to express his appreciation. This kind of gratitude is one of the things that keeps Krista going during these uncertain times.

While Krista continues to assess symptoms and prioritize patient needs, she also has family obligations she must take into consideration. Her husband has become the primary caregiver for their two children. Krista no longer interacts with her kids one-on-one because she is concerned that she could spread the virus to one of them. She is much more cautious when coming home from a shift at the hospital. She immediately showers and launders her clothing from that day. Krista continually grapples with how to balance the needs of her family with the needs of her patients.

In addition to the challenges associated with work-life balance, Krista is concerned that those outside the medical community are not aware of just how dangerous COVID-19 really is, how important it is for people to remain in their homes, and how easily the virus is contracted. As the virus initially began to spread, Krista noticed people were treating it much like they would the typical flu or a stomach virus, still going about their regular routine. In the coming months, she fears that as the weather begins to turn warmer, people will return to public places in higher numbers and could unknowingly be carrying the virus because they are asymptomatic and thus infect others.

For those nurses just entering the medical field, Krista cautions that healthcare professionals are

quick to run from one patient to another and it is essential that everyone adheres to proper handwashing techniques. New nurses must learn quickly to live in this new norm, where you must save your protective equipment and be more cautious about not wasting supplies.

In addition to working on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, Krista is in the midst of earning a master's degree in psychiatric-mental health. Her goals are to help eliminate the stigma attached to mental illness, and to improve the treatment of those suffering from mental illness. She wonders why a patient with a mental illness is not viewed in the same way that a patient with heart failure is treated. Both are diseases.

Had Krista not pursued nursing, she would have become a social worker allowing her to help and care for individuals through a nonprofit organization. Her passion for making positive changes in others' lives would have been realized one way or another.

During these unprecedented times, Krista encourages everyone to stay safe, stay healthy, and stay at home until the order has been lifted. She pleads that just because it's getting nicer outside, please don't go out and put others or yourself at unnecessary risk. Each and every person must take the pandemic seriously in order to bring it to an end.