

Lost on the Frontline

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Note: As of Aug. 10, 2020, all updates to *Lost on the Frontline* are available at khn.org/lost-on-the-frontline.

America's health care workers are dying. In some states, medical personnel account for as many as 20% of known coronavirus cases. They tend to patients in hospitals, treating them, serving them food and cleaning their rooms. Others at risk work in nursing homes or are employed as home health aides.

"Lost on the Frontline," a collaboration between KHN and The Guardian, has identified 922 such workers who likely died of COVID-19 after helping patients during the pandemic.

We have published profiles for 164 workers whose deaths have been confirmed by our reporters.

Some cases are shrouded in secrecy. Our team contacts family members, employers and medical examiners to independently confirm each death. Many hospitals have been overwhelmed and workers sometimes have lacked protective equipment or suffer from underlying health conditions that make them vulnerable to the highly infectious virus. In the chaos, COVID casualties might otherwise get overlooked.

This project [aims to document](#) the lives of U.S. health workers who die of COVID-19, and to understand why so many are falling victim to the pandemic.

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Home Health Aide Was Active in Her Local Community



(Naorin Ahmed)

Rashida Ahmed

Age: 46

Occupation: Home health aide

Place of Work: CarePro of NY in New York City

Date of Death: April 30, 2020

There's not a single photo of Rashida Ahmed where she doesn't have "a very, very big smile," said Naorin Ahmed, her daughter.

Rashida emigrated from her native Bangladesh in 2015 to be closer to her daughter, who had moved to the U.S. for an arranged marriage a few years earlier. In Queens, she became active in the local Bengali community, joining a [local rights group](#) that advocates for South Asian and Indo-Caribbean workers.

"She was a very people's person," Naorin said. "If you met her, you would remember her."

Rashida loved to sing and cook — Naorin especially relished her biryani. Community activist Fakrul Islam Delwar called Rashida a "very helping, kind-hearted person" who brought food to her neighbors in Jackson Heights.

Rashida cared for an older woman on Long Island who died on March 30 of COVID-19 complications. It's unclear whether Rashida became infected from her patient or during her train commute. She developed debilitating fatigue and fever, checking into a hospital on March 31.

Representatives from CarePro confirmed that Rashida worked in an area with many COVID-19 patients and said that all aides are provided the necessary personal protective equipment.

Naorin said her mother did not have adequate PPE but, despite the risks, insisted on caring for her patient.

— [Elizabeth Lawrence, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published July 29, 2020

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Working Two Jobs, She Was Still the ‘Best Listener Ever’



Clea Alverio-Hume and her husband, Dave (Josh Steele/Out of the Woods Photography)

Clea Alverio-Hume

Age: 57

Occupation: Medical records director and lead admissions coordinating assistant

Place of Work: Queen Anne Healthcare and Swedish Medical Center-First Hill, both in Seattle

Date of Death: June 12, 2020

Flowers of all kinds — particularly purple ones — were Clea Alverio-Hume’s passion.

She helped her mother, Felicidad, 82, tend them. Husband Dave often left bouquets at two health care facilities where she worked a combined 72 hours weekly. She did so, he said, to spare her daughter, Minerva, from working while in college.

Over Memorial Day, Clea and Dave started to build a shed as a prelude to her own flower garden.

Nursing a cough, Clea was tested for COVID-19 that Monday. Thirty-six hours later, Dave summoned paramedics. The test they administered came back positive.

Erin Doss, administrator of Queen Anne, where Clea began working soon after emigrating from the Philippines in 1994, said they don’t know whether she was exposed there. “We miss her terribly,” Doss said. On its website, the facility reports two staff deaths, including Clea’s, and 19 patient deaths.

Clea’s Queen Anne colleagues gave Dave a framed photo of her and Minerva with dozens of notes on the matting.

“They all say the same thing — how much she meant to them ... the best listener ever,” he said. “Clea has touched hundreds in that manner.”

— Cynthia Mitchell | Published July 29, 2020

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Social Worker Was a ‘Voice for the City’



(Paula Jackson)

Lisa Burhannan

Age: 50

Occupation: Social worker

Place of Work: Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Date of Death: June 11, 2020

In June 2015, Lisa Burhannan rode to Nashville with “her babies,” a gospel dance troupe — God’s Chosen Praise — that was performing on “Bobby Jones Presents.” Burhannan coached the young women through their Marvin Gaye number that weekend and at many local shows afterward.

“Beyond the shows, she brought the ladies together,” said Portia Bolen-Geter, her aunt. “She taught them, by example, how to live.”

Described by her mother, Paula Jackson, as an “energizer bunny,” Burhannan was committed to her community. She provided trauma rehabilitation to victims of crime, and as a volunteer chaplain at Pinnacle Medical Center, Burhannan counseled grieving families.

“She had a servant’s heart,” said Jackson, “a true voice for the city.”

When Pennsylvania entered lockdown in late March, Burhannan did what she could — including delivering masks to clients. The family said she was finding her own protective equipment; CSSJ did not respond to requests for comment.

On May 27, a “horrible” cough worsened, and Burhannan asked Jackson to write down requests for her own funeral. She wanted CeCe Winans’ “Alabaster Box” sung. The next day, she was hospitalized.

Burhannan’s funeral proceeded as she’d hoped. The mayor spoke, her babies danced, and the mourners sang her home.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | Published July 29, 2020

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A Public Servant Who Was the Heart of Her Community

Priscilla Carrow

Age: 65

Occupation: Coordinating manager

Place of Work: Elmhurst Hospital in Queens, New York

Date of Death: March 30, 2020

On March 10, when Priscilla Carrow attended her community board’s last in-person meeting, she brought masks, hand sanitizer and information on COVID-19 for every committee member.

“She was someone who you could go to if you had a problem in the community, and you needed answers,” said Ashley Reed, who served on the board with Carrow. “We always counted on her to be on the front lines of what was going on.”

Carrow, who was born in Harlem and moved to Queens as a child, was passionate about giving back. In addition to serving on Queens Community Board 4, she was a shop steward in the local chapter of the Communications Workers of America union.

“She loved helping people. She knew she was blessed in her life, so she wanted to carry that blessing on to others,” said Gloria Middleton, president of CWA Local 1180. Her sense of civic duty, paired with a bubbly personality and ability to command a room, made her a natural leader.

Elmhurst Hospital was inundated with COVID-19 cases. Carrow, a year from retirement, managed the inventory and distribution of PPE to health care workers amid severe shortages. But friends say she was exposed to the virus at work and hospitalized in March.

Her death was met with an outpouring of grief on social media from neighbors, friends and her congresswoman, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

— *Isoke Samuel, City University of New York* | Published July 29, 2020

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‘He Did All the Unseen Things to Help Out’



(Kyle Charon)

Paul Charon

Age: 62

Occupation: Traveling radiology technologist

Place of Work: Multiple facilities via Premier Healthcare Staffing in Oswego, New York

Date of Death: June 5, 2020

A devoted member of the Adirondack 46ers mountain club, Paul Charon would, without hesitation, clear branches that blocked a trail. When hikers left Nutri-Grain wrappers in the bramble, he picked them up. When overflowing creeks obstructed a path, he bridged them.

The Saratoga Springs, New York, native “loved being one with nature,” said his son, Kyle Charon. “He did all the unseen things to help out” so others could enjoy it, too.

Charon also spent over three decades with the Red Cross, where he volunteered during hurricanes, floods and wildfires across the country, Kyle said.

During quarantine, Charon dropped by his adult children’s homes unannounced with gifts like a Dutch oven and a pullup bar — he wanted to create a sense of normalcy for them.

As regional COVID caseloads mounted, he continued caring for patients. From March to May, he performed X-rays at dozens of facilities near Rochester, Utica and Poughkeepsie. Friends on staff welcomed him with coffee, snacks and masks (he lacked sufficient protective equipment, Kyle said). Premier Healthcare Staffing did not respond to requests for comment.

On May 9, feeling “a little down,” Charon requested a pot of Kyle’s signature vegetable soup. But it didn’t help, and on May 14, he was hospitalized. A few weeks later, after his father suffered several strokes and multiple-organ failure, Kyle signed a do-not-resuscitate order.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | Published July 29, 2020

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Home Health Aide ‘Embodied Family in Every Sense’



(Jodie Antonio)

Roberta Gruber

Age: 66

Occupation: Home health aide

Place of Work: Circle of Life Soaring Eagles Home Care Services in Gallup, New Mexico

Date of Death: May 29, 2020

Months before Halloween, Roberta Gruber would start sewing.

She’d craft costumes for “her children and everyone else’s children,” said Jodie Antonio, her daughter. Then, dressed as Betty Boop, she’d transform her two-story home into the community’s haunted house, going “all out to make it spooky spectacular,” said Evander Antonio, her grandson.

Beyond Halloween, she had an open-door policy, allowing struggling neighbors to stay indefinitely. “She’d leap to help someone in need,” Jodie said.

On the job, Gruber would drive Evander hours away to chop firewood or run errands for elderly clients he called *shichei* (grandpa) or *shimasani* (grandma). “*K’é* means family” in Navajo, said Evander. “She embodied that in every sense.”

As the coronavirus spread, Gruber continued to care for patients and sewed masks for herself and others.

Her employer said that it had distributed thousands of gloves and masks since mid-March but that it is impossible to rule out the possibility that she contracted the virus at work, despite precautions.

On April 16, Gruber started to feel “off,” and on April 26, she tested positive for COVID-19. The next morning, she developed excruciating leg pain. After being sent home by one hospital, she was admitted to another and urgently evacuated to Albuquerque.

Four failed surgeries and 36 hours later, Gruber was in a coma. The family never spoke with her again.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | Published July 29, 2020

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Youth Mental Health Counselor ‘Had a Heart of Gold’



(Vicky Howard Stewart)

Torrin Howard

Age: 26

Occupation: Mental health counselor

Place of Work: Boys & Girls Village in Milford, Connecticut

Date of Death: April 7, 2020

Torrin Howard was a fixture in his hometown’s gospel music scene, having played for greats like Donnie McClurkin, Marvin Sapp and Dorinda Clark-Cole. “Anyone who heard him connected with him,” said his aunt, Vicky Howard Stewart.

As children, Torrin and his siblings formed a family band, and they traveled to churches, community centers and gyms across the country. They’d load the bus on Friday and return home by Sunday night — the children, half-asleep, already swaddled in safari pajamas.

Torrin’s teachers adored him, and his football teammates looked up to the “Tank.” As an adult, he connected with the troubled youth for whom he provided behavioral health and rehabilitation coaching.

In late March, Torrin developed persistent flu-like symptoms. “PPE was in extremely limited supply” at that time and “used only for individuals who actively had symptoms,” per CDC guidance, his employer said.

On March 28, Torrin tested positive. A week later, he was hospitalized and intubated.

“Next thing we knew, he was gone,” said Howard Stewart.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | *Published July 29, 2020*

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‘When You Lose People Like Sue, You Lose the Community’s Glue’



(Royal Davis)

Sue Williams-Ward

Age: 68

Occupation: Home health aide

Place of Work: Together We Can Services in Indianapolis

Date of Death: May 2, 2020

Three decades ago, Sue Williams-Ward and her husband, Royal Davis, bought a bar.

The dive — an azure duplex in Indianapolis’ Haughville neighborhood — made decent money; but after “seeing the love of God,” Davis said, they turned it into a community center. The center is now a bodega and hub for social activism.

“We took it as our responsibility to bring light to the too-often-forgotten people in this community,” Davis said.

A home health aide, Williams-Ward bathed, dressed, and fed her clients. She brought her grandchildren to visit them and often delivered Thanksgiving turkeys and Christmas hams.

In early March, Williams-Ward took a new job, earning \$13 an hour (a \$1 raise). She was hired after other workers resigned due to concerns over COVID-19 safety concerns.

Within weeks, she started coughing. She kept going to work, Davis said, without protective equipment. Her employer did not respond to requests for comment.

She was hospitalized and intubated March 23 and died six weeks later.

“When you lose people like Sue,” Davis said, “you lose the community’s glue.”

— [Eli Cahan](#) | *Published July 29, 2020*

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A Tireless Advocate for Patients



(Abigail Baltazar)

Nicanor “Nick” Baltazar

Age: 60

Occupation: Director of nursing

Place of Work: Long Island Care Center in Flushing, New York

Date of Death: March 31, 2020

Nick Baltazar loved to sing, even when no one was at home. His wife, Grace, and daughter, Abigail, often joined in. Nick even brought a karaoke machine to the nursing home where he worked, and he and Abigail once serenaded patients there with “Endless Love.”

Nick had boundless energy. He exercised twice a day and walked to work. He was a tireless advocate for patients and his employees, taking novice nurses under his wing and helping them achieve their dream jobs.

A cook and baker, he would stay up past 10 p.m. baking treats to share with co-workers; his most famous treat was cassava cake. When Abigail was studying nursing in Buffalo, her parents would pack the car with groceries and Tupperware full of food he’d spent the whole week making. “I would tell him, you know, there are grocery stores in Buffalo!” Abigail said.

Avid gardeners, Nick and Grace started with mint and basil. Their last harvest was so abundant that he invited co-workers to pick peppers, tomatoes and bitter melon.

After 40 years in nursing, he planned on retiring in two more.

On March 20, a cough and fever came on after work. He tested positive for COVID-19 and, within two weeks, died waiting to be admitted to the hospital.

Long Island Care Center did not respond to requests for comment.

— *Natalie Mufson* | *Published July 24, 2020*

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Grandmother Worked Extra Hours in Nursing Home Ravaged by COVID

Kettely Desire

Age: 64

Occupation: Certified nursing assistant

Place of Work: Alliance Health at West Acres in Brockton, Massachusetts

Date of Death: April 11, 2020

In April, the coronavirus swept through the nursing home and rehabilitation center where Haitian-born Kettely Desire had worked part time. By April 25, 23 staff members had tested positive for COVID-19, and 22 of the facility’s patients had died, [according to The Boston Globe](#). By that time, Desire, who’d been planning a party for her granddaughter’s

high school graduation in Miami, had already died.

Her son Frantz told the Globe that Desire had just completed a double shift in late March before feeling ill. She was hospitalized and put on a ventilator. Frantz confirmed to KHN that her death certificate names complications from COVID-19 as cause of death.

Alliance Health spokesperson Kate Kahn said the facility started having staff “wear protective gear before it was mandated by the state.”

“Plans are underway to create a memorial at the facility in [Desire’s] honor,” Kahn said. “She was well respected for her compassionate caregiving and professional demeanor.”

Desire has been laid to rest in a mausoleum in Florida, where Frantz lives. Her Facebook page reveals an enduring love for Haitian music and her Brockton church, where congregants are shown dancing and singing during holiday celebrations.

— *Jessica Klein* | *Published July 24, 2020*

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‘Brilliant’ Eye Specialist Knew How to Party, Too



(Elana Einhorn)

Norman Einhorn

Age: 69

Occupation: Optometrist

Places of Work: Central New Jersey rehabilitation centers

Date of Death: June 6, 2020

He could talk with anybody, on any subject. He could sing. He loved wine, Italian dinners and concerts: Springsteen, Madonna, Diana Ross. Always with his wife, Joy.

“He was brilliant,” she said, “and he also liked to party.”

Norman had had an optometry practice since 1983 but also worked in neuro-optometry, helping people whose illnesses or injuries impair their vision. He treated stroke patients, Special Olympic athletes and accident victims. “It’s like physical therapy,” Joy said, “but for the eyes.”

After governor’s orders shuttered his office, he saw neuro-optometry patients at three rehab centers. At one, his family believes, he contracted COVID-19.

In May, the Einhorns visited family in Connecticut. They left for home May 9, stopping to see two patients at Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital of Tinton Falls. Days later, Norman lost his appetite and started coughing. Other family members got sick, too — but not the Connecticut crew. Norman died in the hospital about two weeks after diagnosis.

Joy learned the rehab centers were accepting COVID patients, who were segregated. In a statement, Todd Cooperman, medical director at Tinton Falls, praised Norman as “an extremely skilled neuro optometrist” with “a wonderful bedside manner.” He didn’t address questions about COVID-19.

Norman thought he was protecting himself, Joy said, “but it’s just so contagious.”

— *Maureen O’Hagan* | *Published July 24, 2020*

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Lab Assistant Spoke Out About Employee Safety



(Vanessa Campos)

Sally Lara

Age: 62

Occupation: Lab assistant

Place of Work: Riverside Community Hospital in Riverside, California

Date of Death: June 8, 2020

Sally Lara was so supportive of daughter Vanessa Campos' childhood dream of becoming an astronaut that before middle school the two had traveled to Kennedy Space Center, eaten astronaut food and ridden in a flight simulator.

Lara, 62, extended her generosity and kindness broadly, Campos said. She recalls her mother helping homeless women regain custody of their children and treating them to a fancy meal to celebrate.

When COVID-19 came to the hospital, people were scared. So Lara picked up extra shifts. She pressed management about employee safety and PPE practices, encouraging her daughter to do the same at her nursing home job.

Lara developed symptoms on Mother's Day.

Riverside Community Hospital said in a statement it was devastated by the loss of Lara, also "our focus has been on protecting our caregivers and colleagues and ensuring they have enough personal protective equipment."

During her mother's month of illness, Campos drove in the car with her husband, tears streaming down their faces and praying for a miracle, she recalled. The hospital staff tried everything, Campos said.

Her final words reached her mother through an iPad at her ear: "If it's your time, go peacefully. If it's not your time, I need you to fight. I love you so much; thank you for fighting."

— [Christina Jewett](#) | Published July 24, 2020

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'A Good Soul' Who Aspired to Be a Nurse — Like Her Mom



(Roland Mack)

Chantee Mack

Age: 44

Occupation: Disease intervention specialist

Place of Work: Prince George's County Health Department Cheverly Health Center in Cheverly, Maryland

Date of Death: May 11, 2020

To her younger brother, Chantee Mack was "a second mom."

"I feel alone now that she's gone," said Roland Mack, 38.

The two, along with brother Aric, grew up in Prince George's County, Maryland. Their single mother, Sue Ann Mack, a nurse, sometimes took Chantee to work, inspiring a love of health care.

For 19 years, Chantee served the community at the health department, where one of her jobs was to tell people the results of tests for sexually transmitted diseases.

Chantee, who never married or had children, considered her mother her best friend. The two lived together for years, and when Sue Ann became paraplegic, Chantee cared for her. When her mother died a decade ago, Chantee sank into a depression, but she remained committed to helping people. She hoped eventually to follow her mother into nursing.

"She was a good soul," Roland said.

Family and friends believe she contracted the COVID-19 from a co-worker in March when, according to union officials, personal protective equipment was spotty and people were not routinely social distancing. Health department leaders wouldn't discuss Chantee's death but said the safety of workers is a top priority and workplace protections now include PPE and social distancing.

Chantee was hospitalized in mid-April, staying on a ventilator for four weeks before slipping away.

— [Laura Ungar](#) | *Published July 24, 2020*

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Father of Three Juggled Jobs at Three Nursing Homes



(The Moise family)

Paul Moise

Age: 50

Occupations: Subacute unit manager and licensed practical nurse

Places of Work: Alameda Center for Rehabilitation & Healthcare in Perth Amboy, New Jersey; Clark Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Clark, New Jersey; Brandywine Living in New Jersey

Date of Death: April 12, 2020

Paul Moise had been taking online medical classes to further his career when the coronavirus emerged at one of the rehabilitation centers where he worked. Moise's wife, Rose, recalled Alameda Center having trouble getting masks, so "he was ordering his own."

The Alameda Center did not respond to requests for comment.

Paul's job was "very stressful for him," Rose said, "losing the people he knew, the patients he was taking care of dying like that."

By early April, Moise began experiencing shortness of breath and stayed home from work — without paid sick leave. His wife said he requested a coronavirus test but was diagnosed with pneumonia instead. He died within days without being tested for COVID-19. The coroner confirmed it as his cause of death.

Rose, also a nurse, fell ill, too, making it hard to care for their three, school-age children.

Moise, who was born in Haiti and loved playing soccer, worked at three assisted living centers. "He was a good worker," Rose said, "because he was a good team leader."

— *Jessica Klein* | *Published July 24, 2020*

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Hospital's 'Grandma' Was Recalled From Vacation, Only to Get Sick



(Lacey Williams)

Lilly Tsosie

Age: 65

Occupation: Phlebotomist

Place of Work: San Juan Regional Medical Center in Farmington, New Mexico

Date of Death: June 17, 2020

Lilly Tsosie was known as the hospital vampire for her skill at drawing blood. "She was known by all of the nurses as the one who got the job done the first time," said Lacey Williams, her eldest daughter.

People also called her Grandma. Tsosie, a Navajo, had celebrated 30 years at the center. A brick was dedicated in her honor in the Healing Garden.

She always wore a protective gown to guard against COVID-19. Before going home daily, she took two showers and changed clothes to protect her seven grandchildren.

In early May, she started two weeks' vacation at home to avoid the virus. But on May 11, she was called in for the day and took blood on the COVID floor, Williams said, adding "we begged her not to go back in." Within days, she felt sick.

Tsositse was hospitalized at San Juan from May 22 to June 2 before being airlifted to Lovelace Medical Center in Albuquerque.

"She will be deeply missed by her SJRMC family, the laboratory department specifically and by all who knew and loved her," said San Juan spokesperson Laura Werbner.

The family rode in a 50-vehicle, 180-mile motorcade from Albuquerque to Farmington, where dozens of hospital staffers waved as it passed.

"I couldn't stop crying," Williams said.

— *Eriech Tapia, University of Oklahoma* | *Published July 24, 2020*

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Selfless Geriatrician Loved Hearing Patients' Stories



(Max Escher)

Jeffrey Ethan Escher

Age: 72

Occupation: Geriatrician

Place of Work: Providence Rest in the Bronx, New York

Date of Death: April 26, 2020

Before Dr. Jeffrey Escher died, he sent his son Max pictures of personal protective equipment he wore while seeing his nursing home and rehabilitation center patients. The photos depicted surgical masks and a face shield, but Escher remained concerned.

"He would tell us that he had enough PPE, and he was worried about other staff who he didn't know if they had enough," Max said. "He was always concerned for others instead of himself." (Escher's employer, TeamHealth, declined to comment.)

Escher, who earned his medical degree at the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium after studying at Columbia University in New York City, started showing COVID-19 symptoms in April. He stopped working and was tested. Escher, who'd been quarantined with his wife, Monique Brion, died before the results came back positive.

Escher's [obituary](#) in The Scarsdale Inquirer mentions his membership in the Dixieland Jazz Band in his Westchester hometown. During the Jewish High Holy Days, he played the shofar at his local temple.

"His idea of being a doctor was not focusing on a specific part of the body but focusing on the patient in total ... and listening to their stories," Max said.

— *Jessica Klein* | *Published July 21, 2020*

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Spirited Drug and Alcohol Counselor Went the Extra Mile



(David Fierro)

Vivian Fierro

Age: 58

Occupation: Therapist/group facilitator

Place of Work: Impact Drug and Alcohol Treatment Center in Pasadena, California

Date of Death: April 27, 2020

Growing up in the barrios of East Los Angeles, Vivian Fierro wasn't expected to succeed. "She raised the bar far beyond what [our parents] hoped for her," said her younger brother, David.

Vivian's drive resulted in her excelling first at basketball, then scholastically, earning a degree at East Los Angeles College. As a certified drug and alcohol counselor, she dedicated her career to helping people recovering from addiction and those in the LGBTQ community.

"If somebody was about to get evicted, she would maybe pay their rent," David said. She traveled up and down the California coast, speaking at large 12-step conventions and small, out-of-the-way meetings.

Vivian was approaching 31 years sober when she died at home from COVID-19 after possibly contracting it at work. (Her workplace shut down to sanitize after employees and clients had tested positive, David said, and when Vivian went back, she developed symptoms. Impact did not respond to requests for comment.)

"Vivian was considered different," David said, and taught others marginalized by their addictions or sexuality that being different was OK. "She just wanted to know how she could help you."

— Jessica Klein | Published July 21, 2020

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With a Rough-Hewn Style, She Won Over Patients and Staff



(Allyse Gombas)

Sandra Hardy-Rogers

Age: 56

Occupation: Medical technician

Place of Work: Community Medical Center in Toms River, New Jersey

Date of Death: May 1, 2020

Patients said it all the time: "That British lady is amazing." According to colleagues, Sandra Hardy-Rogers was a whirlwind in the emergency department, caring for patients with a slightly rough-around-the-edges style that somehow made almost everyone smile.

"There was nobody as good as her," said Allyse Gombas, a colleague. About 5 feet tall, Hardy-Rogers was "all spunk, all enthusiasm."

Hardy-Rogers arrived in the United States as a young woman, working first as a nanny and then as a home health aide, then got a job at the hospital, eventually settling into an overnight shift in the emergency department.

Hardy-Rogers was devoted to family and loved traveling with relatives. She was thrilled every time she built a Lego set with her son, now 16. She put others' needs ahead of her own.

In late March, she learned that a patient tested positive, [according to local news reports](#). Back then, Gombas said, protocols were laxer, and the hospital wasn't yet treating all emergency patients as presumptively positive. A spokesperson for the hospital did not respond to KHN's inquiries.

Hardy-Rogers soon became critically ill, fighting for about a month in the hospital's intensive care unit before her organs shut down.

— Maureen O'Hagan | Published July 17, 2020

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At 65, Nursing Became Her Second Act



(Jenny Winkler)

Karon Hoffman

Age: 69

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Alden Terrace of McHenry, Illinois

Date of Death: May 18, 2020

Karon Hoffman's daughter Jenny Winkler paid for her first college class, to encourage her. That same year, Hoffman's son, Karl, returned home from the Army and also wanted to take a course. Mother and son ended up in the same introductory computer class.

"She had the No. 1 grade in the class, and he had No. 2," Winkler said.

Hoffman had previously worked as a 911 dispatcher, EMT and, most recently, a real estate appraiser. At 65, when most of her peers were thinking about retirement, she graduated from a local community college with high honors and an associate degree in arts. She took the nursing licensing exam and passed.

She never let others tell her what to do, said daughter Jessica Allen. Hoffman's hobbies included canning dandelion jelly, gardening and going to garage sales with her grandchildren.

In January, Hoffman started her first nursing job at the Alden Terrace rehabilitation center, after taking a few years post-graduation to tend to both her husband's health and her own. She needed the income to afford their medications that weren't covered by Medicare, her family said. Her family believes she was infected in early April, shortly after she completed orientation training.

Her family said that the facility's nurses were not provided personal protective equipment unless they were working on the designated COVID-19 floor, which Hoffman was not. Yet all staff used the same break rooms, Winkler said. Alden Terrace did not return repeated requests for comment.

— Theresa Gaffney, City University of New York | Published July 17, 2020

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'Gregarious' Mechanic Maintained Hospital's Air Filter



(Stephanie Anderson)

James "Mike" Anderson

Age: 51

Occupation: Maintenance mechanic

Place of Work: St. Mary Medical Center in Langhorne, Pennsylvania

Date of Death: April 13, 2020

As he wheeled patients through hallways or responded to maintenance calls, James "Mike" Anderson was "gregarious," said Mark Banchi, who volunteers with chaplains at the hospital.

Banchi, who taught English at Anderson's high school, said even as a student, Anderson was "a personality larger than life."

Anderson was a loving husband and father to his son, 5, and daughter, 9, with "immeasurable" pride in family.

He had a low-profile though critical job: changing air filters in patients' rooms, including those treated for COVID-19.

In early April, Anderson came down with what he thought was a cold. On April 13, Anderson was rushed to the hospital, where he died of acute respiratory distress syndrome from COVID-19.

David Stern, a lawyer pursuing a workers' compensation claim on behalf of Anderson's family, said Anderson was exposed to contaminated air filters and spaces.

In an email, hospital spokesperson Christy McCabe wrote: “We are extremely saddened by his death. We are not able to provide additional information out of respect for his and his family’s privacy.”

“His loss to the hospital is real,” Banchi said. “Some people lift spirits, some people make you glad you came that day, and Mike was one of those people.”

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | Published July 14, 2020

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A Doctor Found ‘the Thing That Made Him Happy’



(Joseph Bongiorno Jr.)

Joseph Bongiorno Sr.

Age: 78

Occupation: Psychiatrist

Place of Work: Private practice in Chicago

Date of Death: April 14, 2020

Joseph Bongiorno worked for nearly a decade with Dr. James Sullivan at Saint Joseph Hospital in Chicago. Neither imagined they would meet again as doctor and patient in a pandemic.

The two had not seen each other since Bongiorno chose to focus exclusively on private practice toward the end of his career.

“He was a one-on-one type of person, you know, and I think that’s kind of why he decided to do what he did with the last years of his life,” Sullivan said. “He found the thing that made him happy.”

His daughter Madeleine said his work in health care took many forms.

He served as a U.S. Air Force Medical Service Corps officer providing psychiatric service to Vietnam War returnees at Eglin Air Force Base. In 1974, he started his private practice in Illinois and also provided services to the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Bongiorno was hospitalized in mid-March and died after being on a ventilator for over 20 days.

“I’ve probably got 30 or 40 emails from patients who found out, and they all pretty much say that he saved their life with his help and changed their lives,” his son Joseph Jr. said. “He never ever, ever planned on retiring.”

— [Ayse Eldes](#), *University of Michigan* | Published July 14, 2020

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‘He Would Come Running in a Heartbeat if Something Happened’



(Beatrice Carrillo)

Emmanuel J. Carrillo

Age: 60

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Hackensack Meridian Health Prospect Heights Care Center in Hackensack, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 21, 2020

Emmanuel Carrillo worked hard to support his wife and three children, sometimes working three to four jobs at a time.

He had been a mechanical engineer in his native Philippines and became a nurse after immigrating to the U.S. in 1988.

“We were very dependent on him,” said his daughter, Beatrice Carrillo. Earlier this year, when she injured her leg in an accident, her father immediately came to her aid, crutches in tow. “He would come running in a heartbeat if something happened,” she said. She described her father as devoted to his family and “lively and silly. Always making jokes,” she said.

Emmanuel Carrillo was only a few weeks into a new job when patients with symptoms of COVID-19 began showing up. Days after working a 72-hour shift, he developed a fever, sore throat and cough. Beatrice, who is also a nurse, said her father did not have adequate personal protective equipment. The care center did not respond to questions about protective gear.

Beatrice said her father, one of 10 siblings, longed to travel the world and spend more time with his family back in the Philippines. Beatrice, who is 5 months pregnant, said his last wish was to be a grandfather.

— *Elena Johnson | Published July 14, 2020*

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Psychiatric Nurse Planned to Host a Barbecue Once He Recovered



(The Chinwendu family)

Gabriel Chinwendu

Age: 56

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

Date of Death: April 24, 2020

Gabriel Chinwendu’s family and friends remember him as a gentle man who was dedicated to his work as a psychiatric nurse.

“Love for one another was his mission, to care. That was why what happened, happened,” said his wife, Gloria Chinwendu. The couple, who had immigrated from Nigeria years ago, had four children together. “His love for his job and others led him to lose his life.”

Gloria said Gabriel was outfitted with personal protective equipment and always washed his hands after seeing patients he suspected of having COVID-19. But on April 17, he left work feeling tired. Two days later, he went to the emergency room.

Feeling better by the time his test came back positive, he even promised to throw a family barbecue after he recovered. He died a few days later.

— *Sonya Swink, City University of New York | Published July 14, 2020*

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Early Brush With Cancer Led Prankster Into Nursing



(The Darby family)

Denny Darby

Age: 31

Occupation: Certified nursing assistant

Place of Work: Fulton Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing in Gloversville, New York

Date of Death: May 20, 2020

Growing up, Denny Darby was a prankster who loved to watch World Wrestling Entertainment. At 14, he was diagnosed with cancer; he recovered, but his cousin Elizabeth Duplago said this early brush with illness influenced his

decision to go into nursing.

As a nursing assistant at a nursing home, Darby cared for his patients at their most vulnerable: He brushed their teeth, and bathed and clothed them.

Duplago described him as sensitive, caring and selfless. “He would spend his money and buy [friends] a drink and go without a drink for himself,” she said.

Darby continued working even as COVID-19 tore through the nursing home where he worked — by May, some 130 residents and staff members had become infected. He became sick in early May and died on May 20.

Darby’s family believes he contracted the virus at work, and Duplago said Darby’s colleagues told her the nursing home did not have adequate PPE at the outset of the pandemic. A spokesperson for Centers Health Care, which owns the Fulton Center, denied that the center experienced PPE shortages.

Duplago said she’s looking into ways to help families facing pediatric cancer, in Darby’s name.

— *Kelsie Sandoval, City University of New York | Published July 14, 2020*

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Friends Say Neonatal Nurse Was a Baby Whisperer



(Lowelia Avellana)

Susan Sisgundo

Age: 50

Occupation: Neonatal ICU nurse

Place of Work: Bellevue Hospital in New York City

Date of Death: April 8, 2020

With eight siblings, Susan Sisgundo had to fight to stand out, whether it was academics or a new dance move, friend Lowelia Avellana said.

The two met in grade school in the Philippines. Avellana moved to New York City; her friend followed. They studied nursing and lived in Queens, 10 minutes from each other.

Sisgundo worked in one of the country’s busiest hospitals, which was beset by COVID-19 patients. A hospital spokesperson said its employees had appropriate personal protective equipment.

In the NICU, Sisgundo was a baby whisperer, adept at coaxing the fussiest newborn to sleep.

“She wanted to have babies,” Avellana said, “but she wasn’t lucky to find a good guy.”

In March, Sisgundo started feeling sick. Struggling to breathe, she was taken to Queens Hospital, where Avellana works. The hospital was overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients, and Avellana couldn’t reach Sisgundo before she was intubated. “It was crazy, crazy,” Avellana recalled, her voice trailing off.

She visited Sisgundo every day until her death.

The friends were supposed to travel to the Philippines to celebrate their birthdays. Now, Avellana is going to transport her best friend home.

— *Kathleen Horan | Published July 14, 2020*

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RN Nourished Souls as Well as Bodies



(The Abellera family and the Angelus Funeral Home)

Milagros D. Abellera

Age: 65

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Baptist Medical Center and Kindred Hospital in San Antonio

Date of Death: May 13, 2020

Milagros Abellera cooked Philippine feasts for her husband, Roberto, six children and grandchildren. Sometimes they'd host nearly 100 people. No one ever left hungry.

A devout Catholic, Milagros also nourished souls wherever she went. "She would always bring people back to their faith," said daughter Kristine Abellera.

Milagros earned her degree in the Philippines and worked as a nurse for 46 years. She landed in Texas in the early '90s.

"She was a mother hen to our young nurses," said Kyle Sinclair, CEO of Kindred Hospital San Antonio Central.

She would speak up with other nurses and doctors if she felt there was a better way to treat patients, Kristine said.

Milagros' low-grade fever escalated in late March. She got tested for COVID-19 and went into home isolation once additional symptoms came on, but finally went to the hospital.

"She wanted to work it off like she does everything else," Kristine said.

On the day of her death, an American flag was flown in her honor at the Texas Capitol. It was given to her family.

— *Eriech Tapia, University of Oklahoma* | *Published July 10, 2020*

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22-Year-Old EMT Treated Everyone Like Family



(Laura and Paul Granger)

John Paul Granger

Age: 22

Occupation: Emergency medical technician

Place of Work: Vital Care EMS in Greenville, South Carolina

Date of Death: May 26, 2020

John Paul Granger was used to working on the front lines. He aided federal hurricane disaster relief efforts in Texas and Florida. John Paul "was dedicated ... to the profession of being a first responder," Vital Care wrote in a statement [published by the Greenville News](#).

JP, as he was also known, started washing ambulance trucks after high school and worked his way up to driver and EMT. He enjoyed boating, flying lessons and throwing the ball with his rescue dog, Shadow. He aspired to be a chef.

"He was one of the happiest people I'd ever met," said Patrick Hahne, a friend and former Vital Care driver. No matter your race, sexual orientation or religious belief, "he would treat you like a brother or sister."

John Paul was the only child of Laura and Paul Granger, who said he had "a smile that would light up any room."

One of South Carolina's youngest COVID victims, he died after a month in the hospital, his mother by his side.

Hahne said he and JP "frequently expressed how inadequate the PPE and precautions" were. Initially, he added, the only protection they typically had when transporting patients to dialysis clinics, for example, was surgical masks. Hahne said they started wearing N95 masks a few days before JP fell ill.

Vital Care did not respond to requests for comment.

— [Katja Ridderbusch](#) | Published July 10, 2020

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Nurse's Assistant Was a Perfectionist Who Doted on Patients



(Mike Graveline)

Elva Graveline

Age: 52

Occupation: Certified nursing assistant

Place of Work: Lawrence + Memorial Hospital in New London, Connecticut

Date of Death: May 19, 2020

Elva Graveline took small, graceful steps down the hospital corridors.

“You could see her smile coming,” said Connie Fields, her local union president.

A perfectionist at work, Elva arrived over an hour early for her 6:45 a.m. shift, according to her husband, Mike Graveline. She doted on her patients with shampoo and razors that she brought from home.

“She just wanted them smelling good,” Mike said.

Elva, born in Texas to Mexican American parents, adored her two daughters and three granddaughters. The third was born in April, but she never got to hold the baby because she was exposed to COVID-19 at work. Elva worked on a COVID floor, caring for as many as 12 patients a day, Mike said.

Fields said she believes Elva got sick from reusing protective gear: In March, Elva and others wore the same N95 respirator masks for two weeks, Fields said, though by early May they had new N95s each day.

Hospital spokesperson Fiona Phelan replied that “we value and respect [staff members] too much to not provide the protective gear needed in this battle.”

Elva tested positive for COVID-19 on May 12 and died a week later of cardiac arrest.

“This should never have happened,” Mike recalled telling his wife. “I just wish this was me.”

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | Published July 10, 2020

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ICU Nurse Who Treated the First U.S. COVID Cases Dies of the Virus



(Kathy Julian)

Kurt Julian

Age: 63

Occupation: Intensive care nurse

Place of Work: EvergreenHealth Medical Center in Kirkland, Washington

Date of Death: May 29, 2020

After the first U.S. surge of COVID-19 patients slammed his hospital in late February, Kurt Julian tended to its victims for weeks.

Then after three nights of caring for a COVID patient, Julian contracted the coronavirus.

“It was almost surreal, trying to think about this crazy new infection,” said his wife, Kathy Julian, an ICU nurse at a Seattle hospital. Her husband had ample protective gear and was careful in its use. Hospital officials said they were grateful for the compassionate care Julian provided.

When his symptoms began, Julian’s biggest concern was infecting his family, including four children ages 12 to 17.

In April, Julian was taken by ambulance to his own ICU and, later, placed on a ventilator by colleagues. In May, doctors at a trauma center used ECMO — extracorporeal membrane oxygenation — in a last-ditch effort to save him.

Kathy and their oldest son were present as nurses withdrew life support. The world lost a diligent nurse as well as a witty, creative soul who loved working with wood and stained glass at the family’s rural 5-acre property.

“I want people to get that this is real,” Kathy said. “Real people are dying.”

— [JoNel Aleccia, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published July 10, 2020

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‘Force of Nature’ Wanted to Reform Social Work



(The Roncskevitz family)

Sarah Roncskevitz

Age: 32

Occupation: Medical social worker

Place of Work: Emergency Department, Kaiser Permanente San Francisco Medical Center in San Francisco

Date of Death: May 30, 2020

Sarah Roncskevitz was larger than life, a vibrant, kind, generous and sometimes vexing bundle of superlatives: “a pillar of strength,” “a force of nature,” “a warrior mom,” friends wrote on Facebook.

“She exuded so much light,” said G. Allen Ratliff, her social work teacher at the University of California-Berkeley. In class, she stood out as always prepared, seated up front and eager to dig into issues.

She also had her troubles in the past, including addiction and domestic violence. That experience, Ratliff said, was the backbone of her work. “She had been very frustrated with social workers in her life,” he said. She was drawn to the profession, in a sense, to right those wrongs.

Kaiser San Francisco’s chaotic Emergency Department was exactly where she wanted to be. Yet she became increasingly concerned the hospital was unprepared for the pandemic. Her mom, Tami Leal-Roncskevitz, said in an email that Sarah was scolded in March for wearing a surgical mask, accused of contributing to the mask shortage and making patients fearful.

In an emailed statement, a Kaiser spokesperson wrote that the hospital was “devastated by [her] tragic death,” adding that the hospital followed all CDC precautions and that her complaint about mask-wearing “does not accurately reflect our policy.”

She became ill in mid-May but tested negative. On May 26, she collapsed at home. Hospitalized, she retested as positive and never regained consciousness.

— [Maureen O’Hagan](#) | Published July 10, 2020

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ICU Nurse Found His Passion Caring for Children, Burn Patients



(Melvin Tam)

J. Aleksandr Vollmann

Age: 57

Occupation: ICU nurse, pediatric and burn units

Place of Work: Harborview Medical Center in Seattle

Date of Death: May 19, 2020

J. Aleksandr Vollmann, known as Aleks to friends and family, honed his caregiving skills as an Army medic and his discipline as an [honor guard](#) at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

But the 57-year-old intensive care nurse in Seattle found his true passion at the bedsides of sick children and burn patients.

“He would tell me he would never leave here,” said Melvin Tam, who worked with Vollmann for more than a decade. “He found a home.”

In April, Vollmann contracted COVID-19, possibly from a patient. He was hospitalized twice with the virus and recovered. He was ready to return to work when he collapsed during an errand at Costco, days before his 58th birthday. He died of a probable heart attack complicated by blood clots related to COVID-19, records show.

“The COVID compromised him,” said his older sister, Jackie Martin. “People that recover, they don’t recover completely, and he didn’t.”

More than 100 people attended Vollmann’s memorial service at the hospital. He was remembered as a talented chef, the devoted owner of two cats, Azi and Kaali — and an exceptional nurse. Hospital officials issued a statement mourning his loss.

“There was so much love,” Martin said. “That really was his family.”

— [JoNel Aleccia, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published July 10, 2020

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Nursing Aide Who Kept to Himself ‘Was Just Work, Work, Work’



(Cecilia Bautista)

Nestor Bautista

Age: 62

Occupation: Nursing aide

Place of Work: Clara Maass Medical Center in Belleville, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 15, 2020

Nestor Bautista came from a family of quiet men. He was quiet, too, said Cecilia Bautista, one of his four siblings.

Cecilia and Nestor came to the U.S. from the Philippines in the 1980s. Cecilia became a nurse. Nestor, who had studied engineering, became a nursing aide.

Nestor lived with Cecilia’s family and worked at the same hospital for 24 years, she said. Nestor, who had diabetes, cooked for himself and “preferred to do things alone.”

He picked up extra shifts on his days off and didn’t need to be told what to do, Cecilia said. “He was just work, work, work.”

Eight days after he was hospitalized with COVID-19, Cecilia spoke to Nestor by phone. He said he felt OK. The next day, he was transferred to intensive care, where he died of cardiac arrest.

A nurse with whom Nestor worked [died the same day](#) of COVID-19 complications. A hospital spokesperson declined to comment on their deaths, citing privacy.

Cecilia has placed Nestor’s ashes in an urn in his bedroom. She plans to take the ashes to the Philippines, where families visit graveyards every Nov. 1, and put them next to an older brother’s.

Nestor had few friends, she said, but this way, “if someone will visit my other brother, someone will visit Nestor as well.”

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | *Published July 7, 2020*

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Haitian Immigrant’s 4 Children Followed Her Into Health Care Field



(Paul da Costa)

Monemise Romelus

Age: 61

Occupation: Nursing aide

Place of Work: New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park in Edison, New Jersey

Date of Death: May 11, 2020

Each day for lunch, Monemise Romelus and her fellow Haitian co-workers would heat up bowl after bowl of traditional cuisine: fried turkey, rice and peas, griot. They shared with all, said Shirley Lewis, her union president.

Romelus, who worked on a floor with COVID patients, was a quiet woman with many friends, Lewis said. Romelus beamed when talking about her four children, all of whom work in health care.

When the pandemic began, workers initially were told not to wear masks so they wouldn’t scare patients, said Paul da Costa, a lawyer representing Romelus’ family. She worked without adequate protective gear, contracted COVID-19 and died, he said.

More than 100 workers at the veterans home have tested positive for COVID-19; [62 residents have died](#), state data shows. Facility spokesperson Kryn Westhoven declined to comment on Romelus’ death but said workers “are directed to wear PPE in accordance with CDC guidelines.”

Management never acknowledged Romelus’ death, Lewis said. When the police killing of George Floyd ignited protests nationwide, staffers and supervisors gathered for eight minutes of silence. Lewis said she insisted they hold a moment of silence for Romelus, too.

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | *Published July 7, 2020*

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A Nurse From Cameroon Who Liked to Sing and Dance

Quen Agbor Ako

Age: 53

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: FutureCare Old Court nursing home in Randallstown, Maryland

Date of Death: April 10, 2020

Quen Ako [was known](#) to wear stylish, bright clothing and break out in song and dance. Posting to an online memorial, friends, family and co-workers described a lively, compassionate woman.

“My memory of you is that of a warm person, one that will break out in songs of joy,” one friend wrote. Another described laughing at an inside joke with Ako just weeks before her death. “Did I for one second think that I would never hear that resounding, hearty laughter again?”

Born in Cameroon, Ako worked as a guidance counselor and teacher before coming to the U.S., where she earned her nursing degree. She worked for a chain of nursing homes and rehabilitation centers that saw massive COVID-19 outbreaks.

Ako's family declined to be interviewed for this article but [told](#) a local news station that she had died of COVID-19. The Guardian independently verified Ako's cause of death with one of her former co-workers. Ako's employer did not respond to requests for comment about her death.

— [Anna Jean Kaiser, The Guardian](#) | Published June 30, 2020

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Firefighter Who Lit Up Others' Lives



(Richard Whitehead)

Mario Araujo

Age: 49

Occupation: Firefighter and emergency medical technician

Place of Work: Chicago Fire Department Truck Company 25

Date of Death: April 7, 2020

Despite fighting fires and treating the injured for nearly 20 years, Mario Araujo remained goofy and light.

He had an uncanny ability to pry open roofs and pop open doors, said Richard Whitehead, a fellow firefighter. But he also loved playing virtual slot machines and cracking jokes.

"He was always kidding around. You could never take him serious," Whitehead said. "But when it came time to go to work, he was just always ready to go."

He was the first Chicago firefighter to die from the coronavirus, the department confirmed. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot honored him on Twitter: "Mario selflessly dedicated his life to protecting our communities."

Araujo approached his relationship with his girlfriend, Rosa Castillo, 48, and her son, Leo, 7, with the same zeal. He was attentive, picking up Leo from school and giving him a tablet computer so they could speak when he traveled.

"He taught my son a lot, even if they didn't share the same blood," Castillo said.

Castillo told Leo that God took Araujo to ease his suffering. She said her child believes he is an angel: "He hugs me and says, 'Mom, I can feel Daddy with us.'"

— [Carmen Heredia Rodriguez, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published June 30, 2020

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Ghanaian Nurse Made 'a Deep Impact Across the Planet'



(Kojoh Atta)

Bernard Atta

Age: 61

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Correctional Reception Center in Orient, Ohio

Date of Death: May 17, 2020

In December 2019, Kojoh Atta returned to his father's hometown in Offinso, Ghana. Kojoh arrived alone, but everybody knew his father, Bernard Atta.

As a nurse in Ohio's prison system, Bernard worked overtime so he could afford to ship "drums of clothes" across the Atlantic to the Takoradi port. Inside were sneakers, sandals and Ralph Lauren polos for cousins. "Always with stripes," Kojoh said, "so the boys knew they were special."

The regard for his father made Kojoh realize “there are countless unsung heroes making a deep impact across the planet.”

In New York last summer, the two visited the United Nations to pay respects to a portrait of their hero, Kofi Annan, a former U.N. secretary-general from Ghana. They cried. “Look at this man, and look at us,” Bernard told his son. “We came from nothing, but we are here. We are making it.”

As COVID-19 ravaged Ohio, Kojoh urged his father to leave work, worried about inadequate protective gear. Bernard refused, citing “his duty,” Kojoh said. “PPE was, and continues to be available to staff,” a prison spokesperson said.

Bernard showed symptoms and tested positive for COVID-19, but he remained home, fearing the hospital bills. Awakened by a flurry of WhatsApp messages, Kojoh learned his father died, leaving behind his wife, three other children and grandchildren.

“He never could live for himself,” Kojoh said, “but he’s finally on vacation, in eternal paradise.”

— [Eli Cahan](#) | *Published June 30, 2020*

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On Eve of Her Retirement, Nurse Took Ill



(Kristin Carbone)

Barbara Birchenough

Age: 65

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Clara Maass Medical Center in Belleville, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 15, 2020

Barbara Birchenough consistently mailed cards to her family and friends, for birthdays, holidays or just as a pleasant surprise. Her youngest son, Matthew Birchenough, said it reflected her personality: quiet, thoughtful and kind.

Birchenough began training as a nurse right after high school and worked for 46 years. Her retirement was planned for April 4, with a big party to follow.

On March 24, she came home from work and told Matthew that four floors of the hospital had been taken over with COVID patients.

The next day, she began to cough. In text messages with her oldest daughter that morning, she conveyed that protective gear was lacking at the hospital. “The ICU nurses were making gowns out of garbage bags,” Barbara texted. “Dad is going to pick up large garbage bags for me just in case.”

When Birchenough returned to the hospital, though, it was as a patient. Her eldest daughter, Kristin Carbone, said she tested positive for COVID shortly before she died.

A Clara Maass spokesperson said the hospital has been compliant with state and CDC guidelines for protective gear.

— [Christina Jewett, Kaiser Health News](#) | *Published June 30, 2020*

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First COVID Casualty Among Staff at His Hospital, Nurse ‘Had No Enemies’



Patrick cain and his wife, Kate (Kelly Indish)

Patrick Cain

Age: 52

Occupation: Registered nurse
Place of Work: McLaren Flint Hospital in Flint, Michigan
Date of Death: April 4, 2020

Patrick Cain was a dedicated nurse, always “close to his patients,” said Teresa Ciesielski, a nurse and former colleague. “The guy had no enemies.”

Cain was from Canada — a heritage he was especially proud of, Ciesielski recalled. He met his wife, Kate, in 1994, when they both worked in Texas. They had a son.

“He was an amazing father,” Ciesielski said. “He was always talking about his kid.”

Cain’s ICU work meant caring for patients awaiting COVID test results. Some days, he worked outside the room where “suspected COVID” patients were being treated. The hospital hadn’t provided protective gear, despite his requests, according to Kelly Indish, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 875, his union.

On March 26, he texted Indish. He was worried he had been exposed to the virus the week before, and he hadn’t had a mask. “McLaren screwed us,” he wrote.

A hospital spokesperson said employees received appropriate gear based on government guidelines. But those rules didn’t mandate N95s — known to block viruses — for workers who, like Cain, were providing care but weren’t performing aerosolizing treatments, which can release virus particles into the air.

COVID-19 came with a fever, loss of appetite, dry cough, nausea. Cain was the hospital’s first employee known to die of the illness.

— [Shefali Luthra, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published June 30, 2020

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Grateful Immigrant Who Loved Thanksgiving Catered to Chinese Community



(The Hsu family)

Alex Hsu

Age: 67
Occupation: Internal medicine physician
Place of Work: Hsu & Loy Medical Group in Margate, Florida
Date of Death: March 24, 2020

Alex Hsu loved Thanksgiving.

Sitting down with his family for the holiday feast, Hsu always spoke for at least 10 minutes about how grateful he was to be in America. Hsu “didn’t really come from much,” said Zach Hsu, his son.

Hsu fled Communist China, first immigrating to Hong Kong and then to Hawaii, where he attended medical school. He served his residency in Kentucky and, eventually, landed in Broward County, Florida, where he practiced for decades.

As one of the few Chinese-speaking internal medicine doctors in the area, Hsu would see “a crazy amount of patients, and he never complained about it,” Zach said. As Hsu aged, he turned to Buddhism and meditation and wrote loving notes to his children as they left for college.

It is not clear how Hsu contracted COVID-19. He had traveled to New York weeks before falling ill but also was seeing patients who could have been carrying the virus.

Hsu worked in a private practice with privileges at Northwest Medical Center. His staff did not return requests for comment. Hsu died at the same hospital where he had cared for patients.

— [Sarah Jane Tribble, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published June 30, 2020

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Hospital Supply Manager Lacked Protective Gear for Himself



(Bill Sohmer)

Roger Liddell

Age: 64

Occupation: Supply manager

Place of Work: McLaren Flint hospital in Flint, Michigan

Date of Death: April 10, 2020

Roger Liddell was a family man. One of nine siblings, he frequently visited his extended family back in Mississippi. He was involved in his church and loved cooking, Westerns and the Chicago Bears.

After high school, Liddell joined the Marine Corps. Upon finishing his service, he moved to Chicago, working for the U.S. Postal Service. Finally, he settled down in Michigan, working at McLaren Flint for almost 20 years.

His job took him all over the hospital. And as COVID cases climbed, he was worried.

Liddell requested protective gear from his hospital, said Bill Sohmer, president of AFSCME Local 2650, which represents non-technical employees at the hospital. Since he didn't treat patients, he was denied — even though his work took him to floors with COVID-positive patients.

In an email, a hospital spokesperson said McLaren Flint had followed government guidelines to ensure employees received sufficient protective gear.

On March 30, Liddell posted to Facebook: He had worked the previous week in the ICU and critical care unit, without PPE. "Pray for me God is still in control," he wrote.

Liddell tested positive for COVID-19. He was put on a ventilator but died, leaving behind his wife, four children, two stepchildren and 11 grandchildren.

— [Shefali Luthra, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published June 30, 2020

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A Doctor and a Poet Who 'Wasn't Done'



(Adam Oglesbee)

John Robert Oglesbee

Age: 80

Occupation: Family physician

Place of Work: CCOM Medical Group Cardiology Clinic in Muskogee, Oklahoma

Date of Death: April 26, 2020

A bushel of corn or meat from the family cow was how some of John Oglesbee's clients paid him. No matter, he always put his clients first.

"He loved small-town Oklahoma," said grandson Adam Oglesbee.

For nearly 30 years, John Oglesbee had his clinic outside of Ada until the mid-90s, when he began fill-in work at rural emergency rooms for a time before ending up in his hometown.

An avid reader of books on every topic, he would always return to the Bible. He was a churchgoer and deacon for many years, often guest-preaching.

Wherever he went, Oglesbee wrote poems, whether on a napkin or the back of an envelope, stuffing them in books within his vast home library.

He saw patients until he contracted COVID-19. On March 19, he went into home isolation. He tested positive March 23.

“He told me when I last saw him at his home through the window, ‘Dammit, I wasn’t done,’” Adam said. “He was a doctor until the day he died.”

Multiple attempts to reach CCOM Medical Group for comment went unanswered.

— *Eriech Tapia, University of Oklahoma* | *Published June 30, 2020*

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Big-Hearted Nurse Feared for the Safety of Those Who Cared for Her



(Lori Rodriguez)

Sandra Oldfield

Age: 53

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Kaiser Permanente Fresno Medical Center in Fresno, California

Date of Death: May 25, 2020

Sandra Oldfield had a big heart and couldn’t say no to anyone, her sister Lori Rodriguez said. She had no children of her own but loved to spoil and care for her nieces and nephews.

She was a nurse who would listen to others’ problems. And she could amplify those concerns for management without losing her composure, Rodriguez said.

Oldfield had concerns of her own in mid-March while caring for critically ill patients in the telemetry unit. She was upset that she was given a surgical mask — not nearly as protective as an N95 respirator — to treat patients as COVID-19 was spreading.

Her concern was on point: She cared for a patient whose initial symptoms didn’t meet the well-known COVID profile, but who tested positive for the virus.

“I feel if she had an N95, she would be here today,” Rodriguez said. “I don’t want to see anyone else lose their life like my sister did.”

Kaiser Fresno said it has followed state and federal guidelines on protective gear. (KHN is not affiliated with Kaiser Permanente.)

Rodriguez said her sister resisted going to the hospital as her symptoms worsened, reluctant to expose paramedics or hospital staffers to the virus. When Oldfield agreed that an ambulance should be called, she wanted the paramedics to be advised to take every precaution.

— [Christina Jewett, Kaiser Health News](#) | *Published June 30, 2020*

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The ‘Life of the Party’ Who Bonded With Patients



(Christina Ravanes)

John Abruzzo

Age: 62

Occupation: Registered nurse
Place of Work: Huntington Hospital in Huntington, New York
Date of Death: April 2, 2020

Long Island is where John Abruzzo was born, raised, worked and died. The second of 14 children, he was the “life of the party,” said his daughter, Christina Ravanes. He loved poker and fishing. He had a son as well, and three grandchildren.

Abruzzo developed strong friendships with patients, said Susan Knoepffler, the hospital’s chief nursing officer. “He had a winning smile. He was kind of a teddy bear,” she said.

He tested positive for COVID-19 in late March and died five days later. “I went from seeing my dad at a wedding,” Ravanes said, “to the next time I see him, it’s ashes.”

John’s wife, Mary Abruzzo, died eight days later, on her birthday, Ravanes said, likely from complications related to Type 1 diabetes (she had not been exposed to John when he was infected).

As of June 18, no other nurses at Huntington hospital had died of COVID-19, Knoepffler said, adding that the facility was well prepared and never ran out of supplies. What’s missing, she said, is Abruzzo.

— James Faris, *James Madison University* | Published June 26, 2020

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A Nurse and Pastor Who Tended to Bodies and Souls



(The Boles family)

Dorothy Boles

Age: 65
Occupation: Licensed practical nurse
Place of Work: Greenwood Leflore Hospital in Greenwood, Mississippi
Date of Death: April 3, 2020

Dorothy Boles had two callings: one as a healer and the other as an ordained minister.

“Mama Boles,” as she was known, was a counselor and caretaker, said longtime friend and colleague Glory Boyd. Boles mentored aspiring ministers at First Chosen Tabernacle Church and welcomed recovering patients into her home.

“She went over, above and beyond,” said Boyd, the hospital’s chief nursing officer. “She cared for other people before she cared for herself.”

When patients leaving the hospital didn’t have the means to recover on their own, Boles opened her home to them, her son Marcus Banks [told](#) a local newspaper. Most stayed a few days. One young man stayed five years.

“Once she nursed him back to health, he just hung around,” Banks told the paper. “She just felt that nobody could take care of him like she could.”

Boles was admitted March 22 to the hospital where she had worked for 42 years. She was among the first four people to die of COVID-19 in Leflore County.

The hospital renamed the nurses’ station in her memory.

— [Michaela Gibson Morris](#) | Published June 26, 2020

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Pediatric Nurse Wore ‘Minions’ Scrubs and Connected With Children



(Carlos Dominguez)

Karla Dominguez

Age: 33

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Providence Children's Hospital in El Paso, Texas

Date of Death: April 19, 2020

Karla Dominguez's medical "practicing" began at a young age, with a doctor's bag she got one Christmas. "Every time I came home, she'd say, 'Let me listen to your heart; let me see how you're doing,'" recalled her father, Carlos Dominguez.

She dreamed of becoming a pediatric neurosurgeon. Hurdles getting into medical school dampened her spirits. Then she pursued nursing, a field in which she blossomed.

"She was so full of joy, so happy with her work," said Dominguez, a doctor. She wore scrubs with cartoon Minions and managed to connect with even the most challenging patients, her father said. A few years into her nursing career, she considered reapplying to medical school, but ultimately decided to stick with nursing because it allowed for more interaction with patients.

In early April, she began experiencing excruciating headaches — symptoms that have since been associated with COVID-19. She visited urgent care and the emergency room and was twice denied a coronavirus test. She was eventually hospitalized. Tests revealed she had the virus and CT scans showed brain hemorrhaging.

Dominguez doesn't know how his daughter contracted the virus but suspects she may have contracted it at work. Providence did not respond to a request for comment.

— Maureen O'Hagan | Published June 26, 2020

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Passionate EMT and Volunteer Firefighter Was 'Constantly on Call'



(Shana Konek)

Jeremy Emerich

Age: 40

Occupation: Emergency medical technician

Place of Work: Lehigh Valley Health Network MedEvac in Center Valley, Pennsylvania

Date of Death: May 21, 2020

Jeremy Emerich and his girlfriend, Shana Konek, made a pact: Home is home. Work is work.

They set aside time to do things they loved, like watching "The Big Bang Theory" or walking their two beagle-mix puppies. "Unless we scheduled it in, it wasn't happening," Konek said.

An Army veteran who served in Iraq, Emerich "was passionate and loved a challenge," Konek said. When he wasn't taking emergency shifts, he volunteered for the Exeter Township Fire Department. "He was constantly on call, always lending a helping hand," said Konek, an emergency medical services dispatcher.

If families of patients were in shock, he'd comfort them — sometimes in Spanish, to his colleagues' surprise. Emerich worked long shifts caring for COVID-19 patients across the Lehigh Valley, for which he was equipped with adequate protective gear, Konek said. His employer could not be reached for comment.

On April 25, Emerich's appetite began to wane and he complained of "a little fever." Konek took his temperature: 104 degrees. A week later, he was in the ICU.

On May 8, Emerich told Konek he was signing some paperwork and would call her back.

“I never got that call,” Konek said.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | *Published June 26, 2020*

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He Bridged Cultures With Cooking and Camaraderie



(Diana Ese Odighizuwa)

Paul Odighizuwa

Age: 61

Occupation: Food services coordinator

Place of Work: Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) in Portland, Oregon

Date of Death: May 12, 2020

When Paul Odighizuwa left Nigeria in 1987, he enrolled at Portland State University to study visual arts and began a decades-long career at OHSU, a large teaching hospital. He became a pillar of the area’s close-knit Nigerian community.

“Paul was such a go-to guy,” said Ezekiel Ette, a friend. “If you needed something done, Paul would do it, and do it graciously.”

As a student, he helped paint a prominent mural depicting African and African American heroes — it stood for decades in Portland’s King neighborhood.

Odighizuwa, who worked in the hospital’s food services department, cooked traditional Nigerian dishes at home — as well as American-style pancakes with “crispy edges,” his daughter, Diana, said.

In mid-March, his union complained that management in Odighizuwa’s department was not allowing proper social distancing. Eleven people in the department became ill, and Odighizuwa died.

OHSU did not respond to a request for comment.

— *Maureen O’Hagan* | *Published June 26, 2020*

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She Answered a Calling and Helped Fellow Native Americans



(Charmayne Bedonie)

Barbara Bedonie

Age: 56

Occupation: Certified medication aide

Place of Work: Cedar Ridge Inn in Farmington, New Mexico

Date of Death: May 16, 2020

Barbara Bedonie was happily raising three children when she realized she wanted to do more. She enrolled to become a certified nursing assistant, which turned out to be a calling.

“She was truly happy working,” her daughter Charmayne Bedonie said. “I’ve been hearing so many stories from families she’s helped.”

For 17 years, Barbara worked at a nursing home and received awards for perfect attendance. Management admired her work ethic enough to pay for her to become a certified medication aide. She was Navajo and could speak to residents at the home in their Indigenous tongue.

“I know she helped a lot of people just by speaking the language,” Charmayne said.

The home had reported a number of COVID cases. Bedonie tested negative for the virus repeatedly, but, overwhelmed by fatigue, she knew something was wrong. She was hospitalized and finally a test confirmed she had the coronavirus, Charmayne said.

Charmayne expressed praise for the hospital and the nursing home. Her employer did not respond to questions about protective gear and said only, “Cedar Ridge Inn misses our beloved colleague very much.”

Charmayne said families have been sharing stories about her mother. “They say she was a beautiful soul, inside and out,” she said.

— [Maureen O’Hagan](#) | Published June 23, 2020

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Travel Nurse Was ‘a Country Boy at Heart’



Denny Gilliam and his wife, Amanda Marr Gilliam (Amanda Marr Gilliam)

Denny Gilliam

Age: 53

Occupation: Travel nurse

Place of Work: NewYork-Presbyterian Brooklyn Methodist Hospital in Brooklyn, New York, via Trustaff

Date of Death: May 7, 2020

Amanda Marr Gilliam was on a cigarette break when Denny Gilliam threw that first glance. “Those blue eyes caught me,” she said. “The very next day, we started dating.”

Gilliam treasured family time, like movie nights, when the kids would pile into the couple’s king-size bed with chips and French onion dip.

“A country boy at heart,” Gilliam loved the outdoors, Amanda said. He took the family hunting for ginseng, digging for frogs and camping throughout the Appalachian Mountains near their home in Pelham, Tennessee. He and Amanda liked to fish in Lake Chickamauga for crappie and bluegill.

Gilliam was a committed nurse — it was his second career, after serving in the military. In April, when he learned New York hospitals were short-staffed in the pandemic, he felt obliged to serve.

In early May, when Amanda didn’t hear from him for “what felt like eternity,” she called 35 hotels near the hospital before finding where he’d checked in. A private investigator confirmed: He had died days earlier of COVID-19.

“My worst fear came true,” Amanda said.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | Published June 23, 2020

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‘He Explored Life Without Restrictions’



(Monique Bertolotti)

Gianmarco Bertolotti

Age: 42

Occupation: Mason

Place of Work: Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City

Date of Death: April 22, 2020

Decades ago, two girls asked Gianmarco Bertolotti to the senior prom. Even as a teenager, Bertolotti was “such a sweet soul,” said Monique Bertolotti, his sister. Instead of rejecting either one, he skipped prom.

As a child visiting grandparents in Rapallo, Italy, Bertolotti would invariably return from town with “focaccia, espresso and stories of the friends he’d made.” As an adult, the man known as “G-Funk” had “a special way about him,” Monique said, “forg[ing] a lasting bond with everyone he met.”

An avid traveler, he’d visited New Orleans and Japan in recent years. “He explored life without restrictions,” Monique said.

A mason, Bertolotti took the subway from his home in Queens every morning to help repair the hospital’s ceilings, floors, soap dispensers and sharps collectors. But on April 13, he called his sister because he was coughing up blood after carrying a case of seltzer up three flights of stairs.

The next morning, he went to the emergency room. A week later, he was dead.

“Protecting our employees ... has been our priority from day one,” the hospital said in a statement.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | *Published June 19, 2020*

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An Unflappable Nurse Who Loved Playing Tour Guide



(Michelle Helminski)

Edwin Montanano

Age: 73

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Wellpath at Hudson County Correctional Center in Kearny, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 5, 2020

Edwin Montanano went to the U.S. Open every year. He loved Broadway shows, especially “Miss Saigon,” but also “Les Misérables,” “The Phantom of the Opera” and “Cats.” He liked candy — Symphony bars and M&M’s. And he and his wife, Annabella, relished hosting guests.

“My parents always had an open-door policy, and [growing up] it was always a very busy house,” said Michelle Helminski, his daughter. “When relatives or friends would come to visit, my dad would take them to New York — he was an expert tour guide.”

In more recent years, his four young grandchildren became a focal point in his life.

Montanano, who studied nursing in his native Philippines, worked at St. Michael’s Medical Center in New Jersey for 30 years alongside Annabella; Michelle and her brother, Matthew, were born at the hospital. After retiring, Edwin returned to work as a nurse at a nearby prison.

Helminski said she does not know whether her father contracted the virus at work, but as of May, at least three other workers at the prison had died of COVID-19. A representative from Wellpath, Montanano’s employer, wrote that, “Our clinical personnel have ongoing access to masks, gowns, and other PPE, as well as the training to use it effectively.”

Montanano developed COVID-19 symptoms in late March and died at St. Michael’s.

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | *Published June 19, 2020*

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A Former Marine Whose Altruism Shined in the Operating Room



(Valerie Alford)

Jerry Alford

Age: 60

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: DCH Regional Medical Center in Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Date of Death: April 22, 2020

Jerry Alford brought the same meticulous care to nursing he'd learned as a reconnaissance Marine. He was a stickler for maintaining a sterile workspace and never passed on the chance to lighten a co-worker's load.

Jerry dedicated 32 years to nursing and spent 27 of them married to Valerie, a trauma ICU nurse. Together they raised three sons and had three grandchildren.

When the pandemic hit, Jerry transferred to the emergency room, where Valerie believes he contracted COVID-19, despite access to personal protective equipment. Jerry's employer did not respond to questions about whether he may have contracted the virus at work.

Jerry had celebrated his 60th birthday in January with a blowout surprise party. His wife and sons invited family he hadn't seen in years. "Not knowing that was going to be his last birthday," said Valerie, "that's the best thing I could have done for him."

— Suzannah Cavanaugh, City University of New York | Published June 17, 2020

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An Urgent Care Physician Beloved by His Patients



(Nikki Friedman)

Arthur Friedman

Age: 62

Occupation: Urgent care physician

Place of Work: Independent Physician Association of Nassau/Suffolk counties in Smithtown, New York

Date of Death: April 30, 2020

When Arthur Friedman did not get into medical school in the United States, he enrolled in a school in Tampico, Mexico, teaching himself Spanish. "He was willing to do whatever it took," said Eric Friedman, his son.

Arthur went on to open his own urgent care facility in Commack, New York. Though he was best known for his decades of work there, he was working at a clinic in Smithtown over the past year.

Arthur loved boating, the outdoors and hoped to retire soon in Florida, to be near his children. When COVID-19 hit, he put those plans aside.

"He seemed like a superhero to us. Nothing fazed him," said Nikki Friedman, his daughter. Arthur began to experience symptoms on April 10 and tested positive shortly after. (His employer did not respond to requests for comment.)

He died on April 30 and was buried next to his youngest son, Greg, who died in 2014.

Scores of Arthur's former patients reached out to his children after his death to express their love and gratitude for him.

— Madeleine Kornfeld, City University of New York | Published June 17, 2020

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A Former Foster Child Who Was Charting Her Own Path



(The Fuqua family)

Clair Fuqua

Age: 28

Occupation: Receptionist

Place of Work: Pineville Children's Clinic in Pineville, Louisiana

Date of Death: April 2, 2020

Clair Fuqua was figuring out her path in life.

On her phone, she saved pictures of wedding dresses and venues, anticipating a proposal from her boyfriend of over two years, according to her parents, Curt and Claudia Fuqua. With an infectious smile, Clair welcomed young patients to the clinic, but she was looking forward to other roles in life.

"She was finally going to decide what she was going to do," Curt said.

Her parents, who adopted Clair and two of her younger siblings when she was 10, hoped she would follow her passion for adoption and foster care into a career. Clair valued the love and stability of her forever family; before their adoption, Clair and her siblings had lived in six different foster homes.

When the coronavirus surfaced in Louisiana, Clair was already fighting bronchitis. At work, she wore a mask to keep her cough to herself. Days after a colleague was diagnosed with COVID-19, Clair developed a fever.

Clair's employer declined to confirm how many staff members had become sick with COVID-19 or to comment for this story.

Clair was hospitalized on March 22.

"Everyone thought she would pull through," Curt said.

In Clair's honor, friends have donated Bibles and more than \$2,100 to a local charity that supports children in the foster care system.

— [Michaela Gibson Morris](#) | Published June 17, 2020

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A Loving Mother and Nurse Who 'Always Looked Tremendous'



(Scott Papetti)

Marybeth Papetti

Age: 65

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: CareOne at Livingston Assisted Living in Livingston, New Jersey

Date of Death: March 24, 2020

Marybeth Papetti cared for beautiful things. She planted a garden filled with "a thousand different colors" of flowers, according to her son, Scott Papetti. Her nails, hair and makeup were always done, whether hanging out with girlfriends or dining out with her husband. "She always looked tremendous," said Scott.

"You wouldn't have thought she had any health issues," said Scott, referring to her pulmonary fibrosis, a condition where lung tissue is scarred and blocks oxygen from passing through freely.

Scott does not know where his mother contracted the novel coronavirus, or whether she had adequate PPE at work. Marybeth worked as the director of nurses at an assisted living facility in New Jersey, which, as of June 11, [had reported](#) 39 cases of COVID-19 among residents and staff and 15 deaths. But she also attended parties and continued regular appointments with a pulmonologist.

Papetti went to the hospital on March 12 with a fever and shortness of breath. She stayed there for two weeks before she died.

Almost everyone who sent messages after Marybeth passed talked about how well put together she was, according to Scott. “She would have been a wreck with not getting her hair done,” he joked.

— [Lila Hassan](#) | *Published June 17, 2020*

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Pitching in After Retirement, Traveling Nurse Was an Adventurer



(Tiffany Olega)

Rosary Celaya Castro-Olega

Age: 63

Occupation: Traveling registered nurse

Place of Work: Various hospitals in Los Angeles County

Date of Death: March 29, 2020

Rosary Celaya Castro-Olega wasn't what you'd call shy. At her daughter's basketball games, she was the loudest voice in the bleachers. She dressed head-to-toe in purple: purse, glasses, phone, scrubs. She was Kobe Bryant's No. 1 fan. And she loved sharing stories with patients.

Her oldest daughter, Tiffany Olega, recalled meeting her mother's patients.

“They'd say, ‘Your mom has told me all about you!’” she recounted. “She didn't just do her rounds and disappear.”

Even after retiring in 2017 from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, she couldn't stay away. She filled in at hospitals that were shorthanded. In between, she traveled the globe. In 2019, she visited Germany, Japan and China.

She had a cruise planned in March. When it was canceled because of the coronavirus, she took shifts at various hospitals in Los Angeles County, hoping to help out. Olega doesn't know if her mom cared for COVID patients. But Castro-Olega and her twin daughters — Olega's younger sisters — developed symptoms in mid-March. All three wound up hospitalized. Castro-Olega never came home.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti honored her as the first health care worker to die of COVID-19 in L.A. County.

— [Maureen O'Hagan](#) | *Published June 12, 2020*

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Phlebotomist Often Struck Patients' Funny Bones



Jess Fajardo (Left) and her friend Maria Hernandez (Maria Hernandez)

Jessica 'Jess' Fajardo

Age: 30

Occupation: Phlebotomist

Place of Work: Center for Hypertension and Internal Medicine in Odessa, Texas

Date of Death: April 12, 2020

Jessica “Jess” Fajardo had the same best friend for 28 of her 30 years: Maria Hernandez. They hung out in school and after school. They got jobs at a restaurant and, later, a video arcade. They rented an apartment.

Even when Hernandez married, moved away and had children, they talked or texted daily. “She would take care of anybody she could,” Hernandez said.

In phlebotomy, Fajardo found a career she loved. Patients loved her, too — even though her job was sticking them with needles. More than one commented on her sense of humor, her skill, her bubbly cheer.

In late March, Fajardo started coughing, but with no identified coronavirus cases in the county, she was diagnosed with asthmatic bronchitis. It got worse. When a colleague was hospitalized with COVID-19, Fajardo went for a test. Days later, she sought emergency care.

Dr. Madhu Pamganamamula, who runs the clinic where Fajardo worked, said precautions had been in place since mid-March. Ultimately, six employees tested positive for the virus; four others tested positive for the antibodies.

Hospitalized and intubated, Fajardo's condition appeared to be improving. But she died after doctors removed her ventilator. Said Hernandez, "she was an amazing friend."

— [Maureen O'Hagan](#) | Published June 12, 2020

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A 'Protective' Presence, He Drove Seniors to Medical Appointments



(Rebecca Garrett)

Brian Garrett

Age: 45

Occupation: Van driver for patients

Place of Work: Columbine Health Systems in Fort Collins, Colorado

Date of Death: March 31, 2020

Brian Garrett had classic COVID-19 symptoms: cough, fatigue, fever, nausea, vomiting, breathing difficulty and loss of taste. But he fell ill early in the pandemic's U.S. spread, his wife, Rebecca, said, and the health clinic he visited said it was probably the flu.

By March 23, the otherwise vigorous, nearly 6-foot-5 father of four (ages three to 20) told Rebecca, "Something's just not right inside." He was admitted to the hospital that day. County health officials registered his as a COVID-19 death.

Garrett, who transported senior residents to medical appointments, became ill before the use of protective gear became widespread. "We had that conversation that all these people would be so vulnerable," Rebecca said. "He became ill so early on that no one was [wearing] masks."

A spokesperson for his employer did not respond to requests for comment about whether Garrett was exposed to COVID-19 at work.

On Facebook, Garrett's nephew, Brandon Guthrie, posted that Brian was a protective figure. "He was our tall older brother," Guthrie wrote. Despite his imposing stature, it was his kindness that stood out. In an interview, Guthrie said, "He genuinely cared about everybody."

— [Sharon Jayson](#) | Published June 12, 2020

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From a Traumatic Childhood to a Life 'Bigger Than Himself'



(The Simpson family)

James Simpson

Age: 28

Occupation: Mental health technician

Place of Work: Sunstone Youth Treatment Center in Burien, Washington

Date of Death: April 10, 2020

James Simpson's difficult childhood in the foster care system led him to a career at a youth mental health center —

where he worked with kids who reminded him of himself. “He had been through so much trauma and abandonment as a child,” said Chezere Braley, his cousin. “And he did not become a product of his environment.”

James’ sister Kamaria Simpson described him as the life of the party. “He was always smiling, even if he was having a bad day,” she said.

James’s family believes he contracted COVID-19 during an outbreak at work, where eight of the center’s 15 residents [were infected](#). Sunstone waited over a week before telling James he may have been exposed to the virus, Kamaria said. She said the center also delayed in providing employees with adequate protective gear and that when her brother became sick, he was told to come in anyway. On April 6, he was sent home with a fever; he died in his apartment four days later.

In a written statement, Sunstone’s parent company, Multicare, said the organization “took early and aggressive steps to prevent the spread of the virus” at work, including “early access to PPE, sanitizer, training for staff and testing.” It added that the company’s policy was always to direct staff to stay home when sick.

Braley and Kamaria said they’re grieving, but they’re also angry. “He risked his life,” said Braley. “He deserved so much better.”

— Holly DeMuth, City University of New York | Published June 12, 2020

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A Physician Assistant Who Mentored Residents at His Hospital



(Alexander Beylinson)

Alex Bass

Age: 52

Occupation: Physician assistant

Place of Work: NYC Health + Hospitals/Coney Island in Brooklyn, New York

Date of Death: April 10, 2020

Alex Bass was technically a physician assistant, but his patients all called him “Dr. Bass,” a title his boss said was well-deserved.

“His patients often sent us letters, thanking us for the services that he provided and saying how great he was,” said Dr. Abdo Kabarriti, chief of urology at Coney Island Hospital.

Bass moved to the U.S. from Ukraine in his mid-20s. Rather than redoing medical school, he decided to become a PA. His extensive knowledge led him to mentor numerous urology residents.

“He helped a lot of people really become who they are today,” Kabarriti said.

When Bass noticed a fever spike in mid-March, he stopped going to work and made an appointment with Dr. Alexander Beylinson, his primary physician and friend of 26 years.

He arrived at his office on March 20 looking “very sick,” so Beylinson tested him for COVID-19 and sent him to the hospital.

A few days later, the test came back positive. At that point, it was too difficult for Bass to talk. Soon after, he was put on a ventilator, until he died.

The hospital did not comment on whether Bass had worked with COVID-19 patients.

Beylinson was one of the 10 people at Bass’ funeral. He doesn’t feel he achieved closure, he said, and still considers Bass his “hero.”

— Shoshana Dubnow | Published June 10, 2020

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‘There Were So Many Things She Had Unfinished’



(Brittany Mathis)

Dulce Garcia

Age: 29

Occupation: Clinical interpreter

Place of Work: University of North Carolina Hospitals in Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Date of Death: May 26, 2020

Dulce Garcia loved to dance. On weekends, she would escape with friends to the Luna Nightclub in Durham, where they would romp to bachata, merengue and reggaetón. “It was our ritual,” said Brittany Mathis, one of her close friends.

At dawn, those unable to safely drive would sleep over at Garcia’s. “She was the group mom,” Mathis said. “She’d tell us, ‘We don’t want to lose anyone.’”

Garcia was “the rock and foundation” for her family, Mathis said. As a teen, Garcia cared for siblings while her parents worked. She also volunteered at the neighborhood Boys & Girls Club.

When Garcia learned about the health care gaps faced by Spanish speakers, she joined the hospital. There, she was “surprised at how much she could help,” Mathis said, “and how many needed her.”

The week after she picked up a Sunday shift, she developed a fever. Mathis was not sure whether she received personal protective equipment (PPE). “Our PPE policies have always followed CDC guidance,” the hospital said through a spokesperson.

The symptoms “wouldn’t go away,” Mathis said. “It just doesn’t feel real. There were so many things she had unfinished.”

— [Eli Cahan](#) | Published June 10, 2020

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A Friendly Nursing Assistant Who Worked Into Her 70s

Antonia ‘Tony’ Sisemore

Age: 72

Occupation: Certified nursing assistant

Place of Work: Stollwood Convalescent Hospital at St. John’s Retirement Village in Woodland, California

Date of Death: April 30, 2020

Antonia Sisemore always wore a smile — around her family, at church and at her job at a retirement home, where she worked through the coronavirus pandemic.

In a Facebook [post](#), her colleagues called her “one of our most talented and dedicated CNAs.” She worked “tirelessly and unfailingly to deliver care, compassion, and love to those more vulnerable than herself,” it said. (Her family declined to be interviewed for this article.)

Comments remarking on her kindness and work ethic poured in from patients and their families. “She went the extra mile to [make] sure I had what I needed and was comfortable,” wrote a former patient. “Tony was one of my mother’s caregivers,” wrote another Facebook user. “She was selfless ... it breaks my heart that the residents will no longer have her.” Some mentioned that Sisemore cheered people up with her sense of humor. “I remembered you [danced] in front of me,” another former patient wrote.

Sisemore’s [obituary](#) says she battled COVID-19 for four weeks before passing away from complications from the virus. The nursing home where Sisemore worked [reported 66 confirmed cases](#) and 17 deaths, according to county data. Over half of the infections were among staff members. The facility did not respond to requests for comment.

— [Anna Jean Kaiser, The Guardian](#) | Published June 10, 2020

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A Nurse, Family Linchpin and Generous Aunt



(Mario Thompson)

Adlin Thompson

Age: 56

Occupations: Certified nursing assistant and endoscopy technician

Places of Work: NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital and Isabella Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation in New York City

Date of Death: April 24, 2020

Adlin Thompson had 20 siblings and more than 30 nieces and nephews. Like her, many of them immigrated to New York City from St. Kitts and Nevis in the early 1980s. With such a large family, it was difficult to keep track of everyone, said Adlin's son, Mario Thompson. But Adlin did — she was the glue who kept the family together.

Adlin worked long hours between her two jobs. When she wasn't at the nursing home or the hospital, she visited family, and "never came home empty-handed," often toting gifts of socks or perfume, Mario said.

Adlin cared for patients who had been diagnosed with COVID-19 at both her jobs. She was always covered in protective gear, said Mario. Still, he worried that her asthma made her particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus. Mario believes she contracted the virus at the nursing home, where he said she had more direct contact with patients.

A spokesperson for the facility said it "followed state guidelines as it relates to infection prevention and control procedures."

Adlin died four days after testing positive for COVID-19. She was alone in her home, preparing to go to the hospital.

— [Lila Hassan](#) | Published June 10, 2020

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Housing Supervisor Committed Herself to Helping the Vulnerable



(Barbara Abernathy)

Michelle Abernathy

Age: 52

Occupation: Residential services supervisor

Place of Work: Elisabeth Ludeman Developmental Center in Park Forest, Illinois

Date of Death: April 13, 2020

Barbara Abernathy said she is trying to figure out what to do with six bins of toys her daughter bought for neighborhood children.

Growing up in Chatham, a middle-class neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago, Michelle Abernathy "was always trying to help somebody," Barbara said.

Michelle spent decades investigating child abuse and neglect while holding night jobs mentoring children.

A supervisor at a state-run facility for developmentally disabled adults, she bought clothes, games and snacks for residents. A staff memo lauded her "big heart and nurturing personality."

She fell ill March 28 and was hospitalized April 6, too weak to walk.

Three other workers at the facility died of COVID-19. A spokesperson for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which represents workers at Ludeman, said that early in the pandemic the staff had a “huge struggle” to get personal protective equipment (PPE).

The Illinois Department of Human Services said it “can’t say precisely” how workers caught the virus and was working to provide sufficient PPE.

After long professing that she was too busy for marriage, Abernathy recently had become engaged to [Torrence Jones](#), a colleague. She had planned to surprise her mother with the news but never had the chance.

— [Mary Chris Jaklevic](#) | Published June 5, 2020

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A Loving Bookkeeper Who ‘Had the Most Awesome Laugh’



(Sean Diaz)

Cassandra Grant Diaz

Age: 31

Occupation: Nursing home bookkeeper

Place of Work: Chelsea Place Care Center in Hartford, Connecticut

Date of Death: April 29, 2020

Cassandra Diaz was a receptionist-turned-bookkeeper at a nursing home in her hometown.

“She was my therapist, my fashion consultant, my hair designer,” said her older sister, Takara Chenice. “I called her my ‘big little sister.’”

Loved ones described her as “an old soul,” loyal to her family, including her husband, Sean Diaz. In their free time, the couple would hit the highway for a long drive, venturing to parks, lakes and the beach.

Her family believes she contracted the coronavirus at work. A spokesperson for Chelsea Place confirmed that the nursing home had COVID cases among staff and patients. It said staffers were provided with personal protective equipment. Despite wearing protective gear, removing her work clothes at the door and showering after work, Cassandra developed symptoms in mid-April.

On April 29, she woke up having difficulty breathing and pain in her leg, said Sean, who called an ambulance. She died that day.

Sean keeps a photo of her in their car. “My six years with her were better than any lifetime I had before her,” he said.

— [Madeleine Kornfeld](#), *City University of New York* | Published June 5, 2020

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A Doting Family Man, He Was a Long-Standing Fixture at His Hospital



(Susan Ferranti and family)

David Ferranti

Age: 60

Occupation: Hospital equipment coordinator

Place of Work: St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center in Brighton, Massachusetts

Date of Death: May 2, 2020

David Ferranti was committed to his two families — both at home and at work. In his job on the engineering unit, he

was really part of every team in the hospital, wrote St. Elizabeth's president, Harry Bane, in a note to employees. "He was always worried about 'his nurses' and 'his departments' having what they needed to best care for our patients."

Ferranti worked at the hospital for almost 42 years "and he loved every day of it," said his father, Savino Ferranti. St. Elizabeth's was treating many COVID-19 patients when David became infected with the virus, his father said, but it was impossible to say where he caught it. St. Elizabeth's had no further comment about his case.

Ferranti was a family man "and the greatest son you can imagine," his father said. He had a wife, Susan, and a son, John.

Ferranti worked in his garden and enjoyed walks in nature. A history buff, he was born in Wiesbaden, Germany. His father, a descendant of Italian immigrants, served in the military there, where he met David's mother, Renate.

For his family, tragedy hit twice within weeks. David's aunt Ann Ferranti died of the disease a few weeks before David. The advice David would have given to anyone, said his father, "is to stay safe, whatever it takes."

— [Katja Ridderbusch](#) | Published June 5, 2020

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A Nurse for Whom Family Was Everything — And Patients Were Like Family



(The Mazzarella family)

Kelly Mazzarella

Age: 43

Occupation: Clinical nurse manager

Place of Work: Montefiore Mount Vernon Hospital in Mount Vernon, New York

Date of Death: May 8, 2020

Even as a girl, Kelly Mazzarella had her sights set on helping others. She turned this innate altruism into a 16-year career at a community-based teaching hospital.

Karen Jedlicka was blown away by the care her big sister showed every patient. "People would be going through the worst things in their lives and she was just there for them," Jedlicka said.

Mazzarella showed that same compassion with her husband, Ronnie Mazzarella, and daughters, Hailey and Kristina. She never missed an opportunity to tell her daughters how proud they made her, Jedlicka said.

In July 2019, Mazzarella was diagnosed with lupus, an autoimmune disease that brought on painful bouts of swelling. She worked on and off through March, helping with the influx of COVID patients. She was diagnosed on April 2 and died five weeks later. Her employer did not respond to requests for comment.

Nicol Maursky, a lifelong friend, organized a [GoFundMe](#) for the family. A staggering outpouring has brought in close to \$75,000.

"She just had such a love and a light that emanated from her," Jedlicka said. It's "very comforting to know everybody felt the same way that we did."

— *Suzannah Cavanaugh, City University of New York* | Published June 5, 2020

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A Proud New Orleanian and Community Caretaker



(Talisa Pace)

Jana Prince

Age: 43

Occupation: Case manager

Place of Work: Salvation Army in New Orleans, Louisiana

Date of Death: April 6, 2020

A “natural New Orleanian,” Jana Prince was bubbly and loving, her brother Paul Prince said.

Since high school, Jana knew she wanted to be a social worker. She grew up with cerebral palsy, wearing a leg brace and diligently practicing physical therapy so she could walk. Kids bullied her about her disability, but nothing would stop Jana from connecting with her community.

“She was trying to share her strength with other people, because she just didn’t want to see people suffer,” cousin Talisa Pace said. “She really wanted to help the Black community.”

One day in mid-March, Jana had trouble breathing, Paul said. She was hospitalized for more than a week before she was intubated, and died the next day. The family said they did not know whether she was infected at work, especially given how early she became infected; the Salvation Army declined to comment.

Her mother, Barbara Prince, died of the virus three days later.

The duo lived together and got on like Laverne and Shirley. They often took care of Paul’s twin 6-year-old boys. “I don’t know how one would have survived without the other,” Paul said.

Jana and Pace had dreamed of opening a coffee shop and counseling center. “She would have been the highlight of the whole place,” Pace said.

— *Theresa Gaffney, City University of New York | Published June 5, 2020*

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‘She Always Listened and Never Judged’



(Tiana Mohabir)

Tina Reeves

Age: 58

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Pickaway Correctional Institution in Orient, Ohio

Date of Death: April 27, 2020

When Tina Reeves visited her grandchildren, music would blast from the car. Wale’s “On Chill” rang out: “Trying to hear all your problems, so I can lighten the load.”

“She loved her music,” said daughter Tiana Mohabir, “even though she had no rhythm for squat.”

Reeves had an ear for the rhythm in other people’s lives, though. Younger co-workers called her “Mother Advice,” Mohabir said. In interactions with prisoners and officers alike “she always listened,” Mohabir said, “and never judged.”

She called her three daughters daily, “checking in on all of us.”

When Reeves started coughing in early April, Pickaway Correctional had already [reported](#) more than 1,500 cases of COVID-19.

“PPE [personal protective equipment] was, and continues to be, available to staff,” a prison spokesperson said. The family said their mother did not have access to adequate PPE.

By April 13, Reeves was hospitalized with COVID-19. She called her daughter to ask her to take care of paying her utility, insurance and cable bills. “I didn’t think twice,” Mohabir said, “because I didn’t want them shut off when she got home.”

Within 24 hours, Reeves was intubated. On the bedside table, her phone kept ringing.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | Published June 5, 2020

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An ‘Icon,’ Hospital Secretary ‘Brightened Every Situation’



(Glenna Swann)

Joan Swann

Age: 70

Occupation: Intensive care unit secretary

Place of Work: Kent Hospital in Warwick, Rhode Island

Date of Death: April 29, 2020

When things were slow at the hospital, Joan Swann would head down to the gift shop.

If someone was having a hard day — the security guard, the patient transporter, the barista — she might buy them a candle. Or charm bracelet. Or a Vera Bradley handbag.

“She brightened every situation,” said Glenna Swann, her daughter. A former nurse, Joan coached trainees from behind the administrative desk. They called her an “icon” who was the reason many stayed working in the intensive care unit.

When Joan was admitted to the hospital, those she had long cared for returned the favor. Her isolation room was adorned with blue hearts, and following her intubation, the nurses would FaceTime the family in. During quiet hours, they sat at her bedside.

The hospital did not respond to requests for comment.

After Joan died, the family found “thousands upon thousands” of unused greeting cards, sorted by occasion (weddings or Christmas) and emotion (sympathy or humor).

In the coming weeks, Joan’s cherished grandson, Adam, will complete high school. Glenna is still choosing from among Joan’s graduation cards for him.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | Published June 5, 2020

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In a Family Who Lost Both Mother and Son, Food Was Love



(Lloyd Torres)

Louis Torres

Age: 47

Occupation: Food service director

Place of Work: Queens Boulevard Extended Care Facility in Woodside, New York

Date of Death: April 8, 2020

Louis Torres went into the family business. He grew up adoring his mother’s Philippine home cooking, so it was natural to channel his passion for food into comforting others. As a food service director at a nursing home in his native Queens, he could cook and work in health care as his mother did.

Feeling terrible on March 30, Louis called his older brother, Lloyd, after work. “He was struggling to make it from the subway station,” Lloyd said.

Louis lived with his mother, Lolita, 73, a retired hospital clerk. She also had severe COVID-19 symptoms.

By the next day, mother and son had been taken by ambulance to separate hospitals. In the chaos, Lloyd said, it took an entire day of panicked calls to find their mother, who was still in the emergency room.

A few days later, Lloyd was able to pray the rosary with Lolita over the phone, and it seemed to calm her. Before they hung up, she asked that Lloyd take care of his brother. Louis made the same request about his mother before going on a ventilator.

“Their last words to me [were to] take care of each other, my God,” Lloyd said, his voice cracking.

On April 7, Lolita died. Louis died the next day.

In the weeks since then, Lloyd was comforted by a powerful dream.

“I woke up and smelled the frying of food,” he said, invoking his mother’s cooking. “That’s how she showed her love.”

— *Kathleen Horan* | *Published June 5, 2020*

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Theater Brought Them Together, Then Life Imitated Art



(Harriet Clark Webber)

Barry Webber

Age: 67

Occupation: General surgeon

Place of Work: Mount Sinai Queens in New York City

Date of Death: April 18, 2020

Barry Webber wanted to understand how things *worked*. That curiosity and drive motivated him to reconstruct an old Jeep, build a computer, take up rock climbing and, of course, become a surgeon.

He pursued medicine when he realized he wasn’t going to become a concert pianist, said his wife, Harriet Clark Webber.

They met when Harriet was a dancer with the American Ballet Theatre and Barry moonlit as a supernumerary — a non-dancing extra on stage — for the company. “He just wanted to be around the theater,” she said.

Barry honed his surgery skills in a Brooklyn emergency room in the 1980s. “It was a rough time to be in an ER in Brooklyn,” Harriet said. “He was treating a lot of gunshot wounds and trauma.”

They married in 1996 and had two sons, now 22 and 20.

Like so many Americans, when COVID-19 struck, the couple watched “Contagion,” a 2011 film about a pandemic. Barry said it gave him a bad feeling.

On March 27, his fears were realized. He texted his wife: “I’m sick.”

Harriet believes he contracted the virus at work before the hospital ordered the universal use of protective gear.

— *Danielle Renwick, The Guardian* | *Published June 5, 2020*

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Brooklyn Radiologist Was ‘Kind, Simple, Loving and Devoted’



David Wolin and his daughter, Helena Cawley (Helena Cawley)

David Wolin

Age: 74

Occupation: Radiologist

Place of Work: The Brooklyn Hospital Center in New York City

Date of Death: March 30, 2020

By 10 a.m. on Sundays, David Wolin and his wife, Susan, would have completed one-quarter of the New York Times crossword.

When the grandchildren arrived, Wolin greeted them with bagels, lox, whitefish “and the best scrambled eggs in the entire world,” said Helena Cawley, his daughter.

Wolin was “kind, simple, loving and devoted.” A radiologist specializing in mammography, he was “committed to learning everything he could,” Cawley said. “The latest medical journal was always on his nightstand.”

He and Susan would skip off to their home upstate on Wolf Lake, where they might take out a rowboat, a bottle of chardonnay and a brick of Roquefort cheese under the stars. “All they needed was each other,” Cawley said.

In late March, Wolin complained of “bad colds” but deferred testing. Brooklyn Hospital was overwhelmed with COVID-19. A hospital spokesperson could not be reached for comment.

On March 30, when Cawley couldn’t reach her father, she called the doorman of his building. He reluctantly shared the news: Wolin had died overnight.

Susan was hospitalized that day and died weeks later. “We’re grateful in a way,” Cawley said, “because we don’t know how they could have lived without each other.”

— [Eli Cahan](#) | *Published June 5, 2020*

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‘Working There Was the Proudest Accomplishment of His Life’



(Maria Joy Agtarap)

Romeo Agtarap

Age: 63

Occupation: Emergency room nurse

Place of Work: NewYork-Presbyterian/Columbia University Irving Medical Center in New York City

Date of Death: April 24, 2020

Joy and Romeo Agtarap met in Queens in the 1980s, when they were both young nurses, newly arrived from the Philippines. Joy Agtarap said her husband was a jokester who had a vibrant personality that often made him the life of the party. At gatherings, he liked to get people onto the dance floor.

“He’s a very good dancer — sometimes he made the line dances too hard and people would get lost!” she remembered.

He was also a dedicated emergency room nurse. Agtarap had spent 20 years at what his wife said was his “dream job” at the NewYork-Presbyterian/Columbia University Irving Medical Center.

“Working there was the proudest accomplishment of his life,” she said. He was still seeing patients when the pandemic hit. (The hospital did not respond to requests to comment on whether he had adequate personal protective equipment).

Romeo was diagnosed with COVID-19 in late March. Joy, who had left nursing due to an injury, became sick a week later. They were both hospitalized — he at NewYork-Presbyterian and she at a facility on Long Island. As Joy recovered, she anxiously awaited updates on her husband’s condition.

“It was the most devastating thing that’s ever happened to me. I was going crazy in there waiting for calls about him,” she said. He died on April 24. “I believe he took the worst of the virus for me, that’s why I’m still here,” she said.

— [Anna Jean Kaiser, The Guardian](#) | *Published June 2, 2020*

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As Nurse and Minister, She Tended to Her Patients, Flock — and Garden



(Elijah Ailende)

Felicia Ailende

Age: 67

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Bria of Forest Edge in Chicago

Date of Death: April 20, 2020

Felicia Ailende was a beacon of unity to her family and members of Maranatha Chapel in Evergreen Park, Illinois, where she was a minister. She counseled many, helping keep marriages intact and lives on track, her son Elijah Ailende said. Though her six children were very different from one another, she saw the best in each.

An immigrant from Nigeria, she planted a garden each year and used the produce to cook West African dishes. When there were too many cucumbers, hot peppers or greens, she shared with neighbors.

At Bria of Forest Edge, a nursing home, Felicia cooked for residents at times or prayed for them, Elijah said.

Administrator Julie Kosman said in a statement that Ailende was a hardworking nurse who was pleasant and funny and had a great rapport with residents.

She is one of three workers at the facility who have died of COVID-19; two residents also died. The facility reported 132 infections.

Elijah said staffers had to reuse surgical masks provided by the facility. Administrators did not tell them when residents and other staff members got the virus “so they could take precautions and safeguard their lives,” he said.

Kosman’s statement says “full PPE” — personal protective equipment — was available to staffers and there is no reason to believe Ailende was exposed to COVID-19 “within our facility.” She “had no known contact with any resident or staff member who showed symptoms or had tested positive for COVID-19.”

— [Christina Jewett, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published June 2, 2020

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He Practiced What He Preached, Caring for Inmates With Mental Illness



(Gwendolyn Davis)

Bishop Bruce Edward Davis

Age: 57

Occupation: Shift leader for forensic service technicians

Place of Work: Central State Hospital in Milledgeville, Georgia

Date of Death: April 11, 2020

In sermons at his Pentecostal church, Bishop Bruce Davis preached love. On weekdays, he practiced it by feeding, bathing and caring for patients at a maximum-security psychiatric hospital. Davis worked for 27 years at the state facility, said his wife, Gwendolyn Davis.

As a boy, Davis would break his pencils in half to share with his twin sister. At church, he hosted youth parades and gave away computers, bicycles and groceries. He distilled the Bible into simple lessons, she said, once winning over a parishioner with a sermon based on “The Wizard of Oz.”

When COVID-19 emerged, Davis and his co-workers at the psychiatric facility were told they couldn’t wear masks or

gloves because it wasn't part of their uniform, she said. Five days after a close co-worker tested positive for COVID-19, Davis was hospitalized, she said.

More than 70 workers at the hospital have tested positive for COVID-19, [according to state data](#); Davis is one of two who have died. A hospital spokesperson declined to comment on Davis' case.

After Davis' illness, his entire household – Gwendolyn, three children and a grandchild – got sick with COVID-19, Gwendolyn said. Their adult son, who has autism, was hospitalized, Gwendolyn said. Their daughter, 22, recovered and returned to work at the same hospital.

“It is extremely hard for her to go back to work there,” Gwendolyn said.

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | Published June 2, 2020

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Dedicated Dad and Technologist ‘Was as Smart as They Come’



(Junette Francis)

Devin Francis

Age: 44

Occupation: Radiologic technologist

Place of Work: Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami

Date of Death: April 8, 2020

Devin Francis was due to get married June 27 to his longtime love, Micela Scott, mother of their 11-year-old daughter, Dekayla.

Scott said her fiancé was a devoted father.

“He’d take [Dekayla] to school every morning. He’d help her with her homework,” she said. “He just wanted peace to his life and us to have a good life.”

“He had a very jovial spirit,” said his youngest sister, Junette Francis.

Devin took a COVID test at Jackson Memorial after his shift on April 6 — it came back positive. His breathing became labored and he died at home early on April 8.

His family and a hospital representative said it was unclear whether he came into contact with patients with COVID-19. Devin also worked in fleet services for American Airlines.

Colleagues admired his work ethic.

“No matter where we were in life, he never had less than two jobs,” said Milton Gonzalez, a hospital co-worker. “He was as smart as they come.”

— [Sharon Jayson](#) | Published June 2, 2020

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A Pediatric Neurosurgeon Who Separated Conjoined Twins



(Judy Goodrich)

James Goodrich

Age: 73

Occupation: Pediatric neurosurgeon

Place of Work: Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, New York City

Date of Death: March 30, 2020

James Goodrich was a renowned pediatric neurosurgeon, best known for separating conjoined twins — a rare and risky procedure. Over the course of his career, he was directly involved in about 10 cases, advising on dozens more.

A late bloomer academically, Goodrich began his undergraduate studies at age 24, after returning from Vietnam, where he served in the Marines.

“He had seen a neurosurgeon when he was in Vietnam, and he just was fascinated at what they were able to do,” said Judy Goodrich, his wife of 50 years. “I thought, just try to become a doctor first.”

He was also known for innovations regarding conditions affecting the skull. He helped develop standards for treating craniosynostosis, in which the bones of a child’s skull fuse too soon, preventing the brain from growing properly.

Goodrich was an avid collector — of antique medical books, pre-Columbian medical artifacts, rare watches and fine wines, among other things. He surfed, cultivated bonsai trees and played the didgeridoo.

He had seen patients in the clinic in early March, just before flying to Mexico for a family vacation. He soon began to feel ill, and when he returned to New York, he was diagnosed with COVID-19. He was hospitalized on March 25 and died five days later.

[Read more here.](#)

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | Published June 2, 2020

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She Brought ‘Calming Presence’ and Fun to Nursing Home



(Howard Fox Jr.)

Leola Grady

Age: 59

Occupation: Recreational aide

Place of Work: Bria of Forest Edge in Chicago

Date of Death: April 10, 2020

Leola Grady had planned to be with her son and granddaughter in Mississippi for Mother’s Day but did not live to make the trip.

At the Bria of Forest Edge nursing home, she entertained residents, including with a “good game of cards,” administrator Julie Kosman said. “She had a calming presence about her.”

When Grady fell ill, a nurse at the facility was already sick with the coronavirus. A nursing aide whose name has not been released also died of COVID-19. Staff at the facility, with SEIU union leaders, [spoke out](#) saying they were unaware their co-workers were dying until they saw it on the news.

Howard Fox Jr., Grady’s son, said his mother was his best friend. An honest, straightforward and loving person, she enjoyed listening to the blues. “I’m not going to sit here and sugarcoat it,” he said. “It hurts. ... I look at our picture. I cry.”

Fox said his mother went to a Chicago hospital with COVID symptoms but was sent home. She was found dead several days later. A Cook County spokesperson confirmed she died of pneumonia due to COVID-19.

Kosman said the facility does not believe Grady or the nurse, Felicia Ailende, “were exposed to COVID-19 within our facility. They had no known contact with any resident or staff member who showed symptoms or had tested positive for COVID-19.”

As of May 27, Bria of Forest Edge has reported 132 coronavirus cases and two deaths to Illinois officials. In the statement, Kosman said it reported worker deaths to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which shows

three pending death investigations at the facility.

— [Christina Jewett, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published June 2, 2020

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Young Nurse Lived a Life of ‘No Regrets’



(The Guzman family)

Krist Angielen Castro Guzman

Age: 35

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Meadowbrook Manor in Bolingbrook, Illinois

Date of Death: May 2, 2020

Krist Guzman packed a lot into her short life. She worked full time while studying to become a registered nurse. She had three children, one a newborn.

Smart, funny and outgoing, she nurtured relationships.

“Hers was a life of no regrets,” said a cousin, Jeschelyn Pilar.

In a Navy family that moved often, she was close with her brother, Anjo Castro.

“She was my role model,” said Castro, who also pursued a medical career as an independent duty corpsman in the Navy.

The pandemic hit home when their uncle, pediatric surgeon Dr. Leandro Resurreccion III, died March 31.

Guzman told family she had seen COVID patients. Worried she didn’t have adequate protective gear, she scrambled to find some online.

Meadowbrook has registered the worst COVID outbreak in Illinois, with more than three dozen deaths. Nursing home spokesperson Marissa Kaplan said in a statement: “Meadowbrook puts the safety and welfare of its residents and staff at the forefront of everything we do.” She did not address whether there was sufficient protective gear.

— [Mary Chris Jaklevic](#) | Published June 2, 2020

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Selfless Nephrologist Fought for Her Life While Treating Others



(The Khanna family)

Priya Khanna

Age: 43

Occupation: Nephrologist

Place of Work: Khanna Nephrology in Glen Ridge, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 13, 2020

Priya Khanna came from a family of doctors, and she knew the risks of contracting the deadly coronavirus. She was immunocompromised and actively seeing patients days before she became ill with COVID-19.

On April 1, Priya was hospitalized in the same facility where her father, Satyender Dev Khanna, had been brought days earlier. He was also being treated for COVID-19.

From her hospital bed, Priya checked in on friends, reviewed patient files and communicated with the physician who

was seeing patients in her stead. She continued to do so until she was put on the ventilator.

“She literally worked for others until she could no longer breathe for herself. That was Priya,” said childhood friend Justin Vandergaag. “Always putting others first with a smile.”

“She was a devoted daughter, sister and aunt,” said childhood friend Laura Stanfill. “Her healing gifts extended not only to her patients but in the many ways she made everyone in her life feel important and loved.”

[Read more here.](#)

— *Natalia Megas* | *Published June 2, 2020*

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‘He’s One of Our Legends’



(Stephanie Mahoney)

James ‘Charlie’ Mahoney

Age: 62

Occupation: Pulmonologist

Place of Work: SUNY Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York City

Date of Death: April 27, 2020

James “Charlie” Mahoney eschewed hospital hierarchies.

“He didn’t treat people like underlings,” said his sister, Saundra Chisholm. “He would talk to housekeeping like he would talk to the chief of the hospital. That’s why he was so well respected.”

Growing up on Long Island, Mahoney was an ace student and athlete. He was one of only a handful of Black students at his medical school and throughout his training. He and his brother, Melvin Mahoney, worked side by side at SUNY Downstate for many years, a public hospital that treats a mostly minority and low-income patient population.

When the pandemic hit New York in March, Mahoney, who specialized in respiratory care, “ran into the fire,” Melvin said. But his hospital, like other underfunded public institutions in the city, was short of protective equipment and staff.

Mahoney started experiencing symptoms in early April, and was hospitalized soon after. He died on April 27.

“He’s one of our legends – he’s one of our giants,” said Julien Cavanaugh, a neurology fellow at SUNY Downstate who trained under Mahoney.

[Read more here.](#)

— *Ankita Rao, The Guardian* | *Published June 2, 2020*

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Psychiatric Nurse Knew Her Patients’ Hometowns and Hobbies



(Eddie Ballard)

Shenetta White-Ballard

Age: 44

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Legacy Nursing and Rehabilitation of Port Allen, Louisiana

Date of Death: May 1, 2020

Eddie Ballard was baking “Pecan Delight” pie at the Piccadilly Cafeteria in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, when Shenetta White, accompanying her auntie and grandmother, leaned over the buffet counter to grab a Jell-O.

“She gave me this look,” Ballard said, and he gathered the confidence to ask for her number. On their first date he quickly realized “not only was she beautiful, but she was mature beyond her years.”

That maturity manifested across her life.

As a nurse to psychiatric patients, she was adored by those she “saw as people more than just patients,” Ballard said. She knew their parents’ names, their hometowns and hobbies. At home, White-Ballard was “queen of the house,” Ballard said. She handled the errands and the finances, while “her two boys [Ballard and his son, Warren] hung on whatever she asked.”

With a preexisting condition, White-Ballard depended on supplemental oxygen. She died May 1, just three days after developing COVID-19 symptoms.

In an email, a Legacy spokesperson wrote that the facility had followed all guidelines and “had more than enough PPE.”

The first piece of jewelry Ballard bought his wife was a bracelet that read: “Love is patient, love is kind, love never ends.”

“I hadn’t read that in 11 years,” he said, “but boy, it’s still true.”

— [Eli Cahan](#) | Published June 2, 2020

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From His ICU Bed, Nurse Planned to Help Fight COVID After Recovery



Christopher Dean with his wife, Natalya Kubaevskaya (Photo by Donna Dean/Natalya Kubaevskaya)

Christopher Dean

Age: 37

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Northport VA Medical Center’s Valley Stream Clinic in Valley Stream, New York

Date of Death: April 15, 2020

When Christopher Dean went to the emergency room, he was “absolutely positive” he would be in the hospital a few days, get some fluids and oxygen and then go home.

“He was always optimistic, full of life,” said Natalya Kubaevskaya, his wife of 10 years. “And he had a big heart.”

When tests came back positive for COVID-19, he planned to recover and then help fight the disease by donating blood and plasma. Three weeks later, he was dead.

He had mild asthma, his wife said, but was a healthy man who loved snowboarding, swimming and racquetball.

His father, Alvin Dean, shared on a GoFundMe page that Christopher Dean caught the coronavirus at work. Northport said by email that it provided “PPE in accordance with CDC guidelines.”

Kubaevskaya, who recently finished treatment for breast cancer, said Dean pushed her to keep going.

Daughter Donna, 15, struggles with her adoptive father’s death. “There are moments,” Kubaevskaya said, “when she tries to convince herself that he’s still in the hospital and will come home soon.”

— [Katja Ridderbusch](#) | Published May 29, 2020

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A Robotic Surgery Expert Who ‘Just Made Everything Fun’



(The Lopez family)

Maria Lopez

Age: 63

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: University of Illinois Hospital in Chicago

Date of Death: May 4, 2020

“What lady? I don’t see a lady here.”

That was the sort of self-deprecating comment Maria Lopez would fire back when teased by a co-worker about an etiquette faux pas in the operating room.

Lopez knew how to break the tension, said chief nurse anesthetist Mary Ann Zervakis Brent, a colleague since 2005. Lopez called everyone “amigo” or “amiga,” regardless of rank.

“She just made everything fun,” Zervakis Brent said.

Lopez was an expert in robotic surgery and trained others to use the equipment.

She taught her two daughters to be independent. The oldest of nine kids, Lopez fought her father’s expectation that she forgo college, said her daughter Maria, who was named for her.

Lopez’s symptoms appeared days after she returned to work from leave for knee surgery. She planned to retire April 30.

In the hospital, Lopez tried to stay positive. Yet during one FaceTime call, daughter Maria said, “she just broke down. She said, ‘I wouldn’t want anyone I love going through what I’m going through right now.’”

A hospital official confirmed in a statement that Lopez died of complications of COVID-19.

— [Mary Chris Jaklevic](#) | Published May 29, 2020

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With Retirement in Sight, She Died Awaiting COVID Test Results



(Hannilette Huelgas)

Hazel Mijares

Age: 66

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Amsterdam Nursing Home in New York City

Date of Death: March 30, 2020

Faith was central to Hazel Mijares’ life. She was a lay leader at Trinity United Methodist Church in Jersey City, New Jersey.

She was drawn to church as a child in the Philippines, sister Hannilette Huelgas said. Theirs was a big family with nine children. At get-togethers, Mijares always led the prayers.

After a long career, Mijares was finally ready to retire in late March.

She worked through March 13, burned up accrued paid time off, then stopped back a week later for her last day. As she said her goodbyes, she noticed a little cough.

Learning that one of her patients had died of COVID-19, Mijares tried several times to get tested. Her results were

expected March 30. When Huelgas called that day, Mijares didn't answer. She had died waiting for the results, which the family learned were positive.

As of May 24, the nursing home had recorded 45 presumed-COVID deaths. Officials there did not respond to requests for comment, but a phone recording updated May 21 said they had "completed COVID-19 testing of residents" and had "begun testing of all staff."

"Our dedicated and caring staff are continuing the Amsterdam tradition of providing exceptional care," the recording noted.

Mijares "had wanted to go to Jerusalem, to the Philippines," Huelgas said. "And she didn't even get to enjoy retirement."

— [Maureen O'Hagan](#) | Published May 29, 2020

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You Could Count on Him 'for Anything'



(Griselda Bubb-Johnson)

Adiel Montgomery

Age: 39

Occupation: Security guard

Place of Work: Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York

Date of Death: April 5, 2020

When Griselda Bubb-Johnson couldn't reach her friend Marva — hospitalized with COVID-19 — Bubb-Johnson called her son, Adiel Montgomery.

Montgomery, a security guard in the hospital's emergency department, found Marva in the ICU. He then did "everything for her," Bubb-Johnson said. When Marva was cold, he got a blanket. When she was hungry, he got food. When her phone died, he found a charger.

"Some people boast about their children, but I didn't have to," Bubb-Johnson said, "because everybody knew you could count on Adiel for anything."

Montgomery doted on residents as a part-time supervisor at the Urban Resource Institute, a domestic violence shelter. He invited his godbrothers for Golden State Warriors games, Thanksgiving and sometimes for his mom's renowned oxtail dish.

Two weeks after Montgomery noted he couldn't taste his lunch, he experienced acute chest pain. When, after 12 hours in the ER, his heart stopped "nobody could believe it," Bubb-Johnson said.

Montgomery was vocal about a lack of personal protective equipment for hospital security guards, [according to a New York Times report](#). The hospital did not respond to requests for comment.

Montgomery's 14-year-old daughter, Aaliyah, never got to say goodbye. She wrote a poem to put in the coffin.

"Don't worry," Bubb-Johnson told her. "He'll read it. I promise."

— [Eli Cahan](#) | Published May 29, 2020

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Traveling Nurse 'Wanted to Be Somebody'



(Daniel Perea)

David Joel Perea

Age: 35

Occupation: Traveling registered nurse

Place of Work: Lakeside Health & Wellness Suites in Reno, Nevada, via MAS Medical Staffing

Date of Death: April 19, 2020

David Joel Perea would call in from Maine, Vermont, Minnesota and, ultimately, Nevada, with the same request: “Mom, can you send tamales?” Dominga Perea would ship them overnight. This is how she always knew where her son was.

A traveling nurse routinely pulling 80-hour weeks, David “had a tremendous work ethic,” said his brother, Daniel. A young David, returning from his father’s mechanic shop, said, “I don’t want to spend life sweating under a car,” Dominga recalled. “I want to be somebody.”

Dominga was proud of him, “for doing God’s work.”

When “mijito” didn’t respond to her text April 6, Dominga knew something was wrong: “I could always tell how David was. If he said ‘Hi, Mama,’ he was happy. If he said ‘I’m fine, Mom,’ he was tired.”

This time he said neither. “Don’t panic, Mama,” David wrote, “just pray for me. I have the COVID.”

His workplace did not respond to requests for comment.

David FaceTimed with his mother on Easter Sunday. “He was starving, but he struggled even eating mashed potatoes,” Dominga said, “because he couldn’t breathe.” The next morning, he was on a ventilator and never woke up.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | Published May 29, 2020

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His Church Became His Second Home



(Lean Carlo Romualdo)

Ritchie Villena

Age: 44

Occupation: Physical therapist

Place of Work: SportsMed Physical Therapy clinic in Glen Rock, New Jersey, placed by AHVIA Staffing Solutions in Jersey City

Date of Death: April 15, 2020

When Ritchie Villena emigrated from the Philippines in 2011 after studying physical therapy, he struggled. Then he got in touch with Lean Carlo Romualdo, a fellow Filipino physical therapist in New York state. Villena moved in with him and secured a good job at a sports medicine clinic.

He became devoted to his church, Iglesia Ni Cristo, where he spent hours singing with the choir and practicing the organ. “He’s not an outgoing person,” Romualdo said. “But if you ask people in his religious group here in Rockland County, everyone will know him.”

Romualdo’s 7-year-old still plays the “Baby Shark” song Villena taught him on the piano, asking, “Is Uncle Ritchie coming back home?”

It’s unclear how Villena contracted the coronavirus. According to the staffing agency, he worked until March 13 and took ill the following week. On March 26, he called 911 with difficulty breathing; he was hospitalized until his death.

Villena, who only recently gained permanent residency status, hadn’t seen his family in nine years. “Every time his mom calls me, she wants to see Ritchie’s stuff,” Romualdo said. As he gives a video tour of Villena’s room, she can’t stop crying. He promised to pack everything and send it home.

— [Maureen O’Hagan](#) | Published May 29, 2020

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Nurse With ‘Heartwarming’ Smile Did Her Best for Her Children



(Anderson Family)

Jenniffer Anderson-Davis

Age: 44

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Meramec Bluffs Life Plan Community in Ballwin, Missouri

Date of Death: April 14, 2020

As a single mother, Jenniffer Anderson-Davis was determined to give her three children everything they needed, so she pursued her nursing degree while delivering pizza to make ends meet.

“She always did the best that she could to give them the best life,” her brother Earl Anderson said.

Most recently, Anderson-Davis worked as an admission and discharge nurse at a senior living community. Her mother, Edna Anderson, said that Anderson-Davis was concerned about residents who returned to the facility after visiting Florida (it has since banned reentry for residents who spent time away).

Anderson-Davis tested positive for COVID-19 on April 9 and died at home five days later. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration opened a fatality investigation at Meramec Bluffs on April 16.

Lutheran Senior Services, the nonprofit that operates Meramec Bluffs, acknowledged Anderson-Davis’ death but did not respond to specific questions about her case. In a statement, a spokesperson said: “Jenniffer’s coworkers remember her as a thorough and well-respected nurse who had a smile that could warm any heart.”

— [Cara Anthony, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 26, 2020

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A Tireless Nurse, She Loved Her Children and Travel



(Stefaney Cicala)

Susan Cicala

Age: 60

Occupation: Registered nurse

Places of Work: Northern State Prison in Newark, New Jersey; Clara Maass Medical Center in Belleville, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 4, 2020

Susan Cicala worked long hours. A typical workday began at the hospital surgery department at 5:30 a.m. She’d work there until 2 p.m., and an hour later would start her next eight-hour shift at a nearby state prison. She worked weekends, too.

As for sleep? “She must have slept somewhere, but I don’t know,” her son, Steven Cicala, said with a laugh. “She was the hardest worker I ever met.”

Reminiscing on Facebook, colleagues said she talked about her two children constantly. She started wrapping Christmas presents in May. She loved to travel, to Disney World and national parks, and saw vacations as opportunities to learn about the world beyond New Jersey — on a trip to Hawaii, she delved into the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Cicala became sick in late March and died in early April; her family said they presume she contracted the virus at one of her jobs.

“She didn’t go anywhere else,” Steven said.

As of May 21, the New Jersey Department of Corrections had tallied 152 COVID-19 cases at the prison where Cicala worked; 134 of those diagnoses were among staffers. In early May, the union representing Cicala and other workers filed a safety complaint saying precautions have been inadequate and may have led to Cicala’s death. A spokesperson for the prison health care agency that employed Cicala said that it had followed all state and federal guidelines, and that the staff was provided with personal protective equipment.

— [Maureen O’Hagan](#) | *Published May 26, 2020*

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The Single Mother Dreamed of Opening a Nursing Home



(Rebecca Gbodi)

Helen Gbodi

Age: 54

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: MedStar Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C.

Date of Death: April 19, 2020

Helen Gbodi was known for helping elderly neighbors and fellow churchgoers — picking up their medications and groceries and accompanying them on walks. She even dispatched her daughter, Rebecca Gbodi, to shovel snow in neighbors’ driveways.

“Even when she didn’t have a lot, she would always give,” Rebecca said of her mother, who worked long hours to put her children through college and helped pay school fees for other relatives. This year, she embarked on her own dream: crafting plans to open her own nursing home, her daughter said.

Gbodi understood the severity of COVID-19 early on. In March, she called every person in her contacts list, including people she hadn’t talked to in years, to make sure they were aware and taking precautions, her daughter said. Though she did not actively care for patients who had been diagnosed with COVID-19, such patients were being treated on her floor, her daughter said.

Days later, she was fighting for her life. By the time she was hospitalized with COVID-19, she was too weak to lift her arm for a virtual handshake with her daughter on FaceTime.

“At the end of the day, she was willing to put her life in danger for others,” Rebecca said.

— [Anna Jean Kaiser, *The Guardian*](#) | *Published May 26, 2020*

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Always Upbeat, Patient Transporter Was a Sewing Wiz



(The Ismayl family)

Gabrail ‘Gabe’ Ismayl

Age: 62

Occupation: Patient transport worker

Place of Work: Swedish Hospital in Chicago

Date of Death: May 6, 2020

Caring, upbeat, always first to arrive at a party. Gabrail Ismayl loved an excuse to don a suit and splash on cologne.

That’s how Fidelline Youhanna remembers her uncle. “Everybody loved Gaby,” she said.

After migrating from Syria in the 1980s, Ismayl ran wholesale clothing shops on Chicago's North Side. He was a wiz with the sewing machine and enjoyed altering dresses, making curtains and doing creative projects for family and friends.

Later, his people skills were an asset as he wheeled patients where they needed to go.

As the pandemic took hold, Ismayl worked despite health conditions that elevated his risk, Youhanna said.

"I think he just liked his job," she said. "He made a lot of friends there."

On May 6, Ismayl was self-isolating in the basement of the house he shared with two sisters. He was short of breath, Youhanna said. By evening, he was dead.

Ismayl was employed by management services company Sodexo. The CEO of its health care division in North America, Catherine Tabaka, said in a statement that his passing "is a tragic loss for Sodexo and we mourn an incredible friend and presence."

— [Mary Chris Jaklevic](#) | Published May 26, 2020

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Charismatic Surgical Technician Taught His Kids to Be 'Faithful to Your Job'



(The Martinez family)

Juan Martinez

Age: 60

Occupation: Surgical technician

Place of Work: University of Illinois Hospital in Chicago

Date of Death: April 27, 2020

It was easy to befriend Juan Martinez.

The surgical technician "could start a conversation up with anyone about anything," said Jose Moreno, an operating room nurse and co-worker.

He went out of his way to teach others what he learned from 34 years in the field, said his son, Juan Martinez Jr., who followed his dad's career path at the same hospital.

The military veteran and former church pastor set an example "to be faithful to your job," his son said.

Due to retire April 30, Martinez anticipated spending time with his grandchildren, traveling and opening Bible education centers in Mexico, his family said.

After feeling tired and feverish, he went to be tested for COVID-19 on April 17. His symptoms were so severe that he was taken by ambulance to the hospital where he worked.

Family members said Martinez did not engage in direct patient care but came in contact with staffers who did.

Juan Jr. said that losing his dad has been like a nightmare, and that he and his siblings are "leaning on the Lord and praying a lot, just like how our father taught us."

— [Mary Chris Jaklevic](#) | Published May 26, 2020

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Memory Care Nurse Set Fear Aside



(Jessica Forbes)

Nina Forbes

Age: 56

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Silverado memory care facility in Alexandria, Virginia

Date of Death: April 25, 2020

Nina Forbes refused to let fear stop her from living.

She was terrified of flying. But a few years ago, Forbes got on a plane for the first time to watch her younger daughter, Jennifer, play volleyball.

COVID-19 also scared Forbes, and as a nurse at an assisted living facility, she knew the virus posed a serious risk. Still, she continued showing up to work.

Forbes tested COVID-positive just after Easter. Chills, body aches and a fever kept her from attending family dinner that Sunday. By the following weekend, she struggled to breathe and couldn't walk on her own. An ambulance took her to the hospital.

Her older daughter, Jessica, said her mother didn't have the necessary protection at work. Forbes sometimes wore trash bags to protect herself, she said.

In a statement, a representative for the facility said it met the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines for personal protective equipment. Employees sometimes used trash bags as an added layer of protection, worn over a disposable gown, according to the representative.

Forbes appeared to do what she wanted even in her final moments. Jennifer was able to visit her mother in the hospital, and Forbes died shortly after she left, Jessica said. "It was like she waited for her to leave."

— [Carmen Heredia Rodriguez, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 19, 2020

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A Family Man Who Loved Disney, Took Risks to Help Others



(AMR Southwest Mississippi)

David Martin

Age: 52

Occupation: Paramedic

Place of Work: AMR Southwest Mississippi, covering Amite and Wilkinson counties

Date of Death: April 22, 2020

On March 22, David Martin changed his Facebook profile picture. Around his smiling face, the frame read, "I can't stay home ... I'm a healthcare worker."

Outside of work, he was a dedicated family man with two children, known for his love of Disney.

Martin, who covered 1,420 square miles across two rural counties, had cared for people with suspected COVID-19 in the weeks leading up to his death, said Tim Houghton, chief of operations for AMR Southwest Mississippi.

"We do what we do knowing the risks," Houghton said. But Martin's death was "a hard hit."

On March 23, at the end of a shift, Martin told a supervisor he had mild flu symptoms. A month later, he died at a hospital in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

AMR paramedics had N95 masks and protective gear and followed Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, Houghton said. "We have not yet had a shortage."

In Facebook posts honoring Martin, colleagues described his excitement before trips to Disney World. In his memory, his fiancée, Jeanne Boudreaux, shared a photo of a hot air balloon ride at Disney Springs.

— [Michaela Gibson Morris](#) | Published May 19, 2020

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For a 9/11 First Responder, ‘Sitting on the Sidelines Was Never in His DNA’



(Erin Esposito)

Matthew ‘Matty’ Moore

Age: 52

Occupation: Radiologic technologist

Place of Work: Northwell Health’s GoHealth Urgent Care in Eltingville, Staten Island, New York City

Date of Death: April 17, 2020

Matthew Moore “would give the shirt off his back to help others,” said his sister, Erin Esposito.

A former firefighter and Staten Island native, “Matty” Moore volunteered as a first responder for weeks after 9/11, “even when everyone else stopped going,” Esposito said.

Moore was known as “a gentle giant” in Prince’s Bay, his brother-in-law Adam Esposito said. He was a devoted churchgoer and a beloved member of “The Beach Boys Firehouse” (as Engine 161/81 was nicknamed).

He even came through as Santa Claus, delivering gifts on Christmas morning to the children of two firefighters who died on 9/11.

Moore became an X-ray technologist, cherishing the ability to help those seeking urgent care. When COVID-19 emerged, he continued showing up to work. “Sitting on the sidelines was never in his DNA,” Erin Esposito said.

At the time, the family was reassured that he was receiving the personal protective equipment he needed. Despite his precautions, when Matty contracted COVID-19, it tore through his lungs, which had been damaged at ground zero.

As Matty lay dying, Esposito sought to reassure her brother. “You’ve done enough for us,” she told him, over the phone. Moments later, Matty’s heart stopped beating.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | Published May 19, 2020

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‘Gentle Soul’ Had a Brilliant Mind and a Big Heart

Neftali “Neff” Rios

Age: 37

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: St. Francis Hospital’s intensive care unit in Memphis, Tennessee

Date of Death: April 26, 2020

Hospital colleagues loved working with Neftali “Neff” Rios. He was humble, kind and capable, a “gentle soul” who always strived to learn something new. Not just smart — “I’m talking extremely intelligent,” his brother Josue Rios said. And he simply loved people. Nursing was a perfect fit.

Neff worked at a small hospital in Clarksdale, Mississippi, then earned his master’s in business administration with an emphasis on health care, and moved to St. Francis, hoping to enter management.

In mid-April, he came down with fever, body aches and a terrible cough and tested positive for the coronavirus. Several family members got sick, too. His parents were hospitalized.

On April 26, Neff collapsed at home, unable to catch his breath. His wife, Kristina, called 911, started CPR and waited for the EMTs. When they arrived, he had already died.

The family believes he was exposed at work. A spokesperson for the hospital declined to comment, citing family privacy.

“Neff was never scared” of catching the virus at work, Rios said. “You take an oath to take care of people, no matter what.”

— [Maureen O’Hagan](#) | *Published May 19, 2020*

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His Warmth and Generosity Brought Diverse Clients to His Pharmacy



(The Titi family)

Saif Titi

Age: 72

Occupation: Pharmacist

Place of Work: Noble Pharmacy in Jersey City, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 7, 2020

When the pandemic hit, Saif Titi was working six days a week at his Jersey City pharmacy and had no interest in slowing down. As was his way, he wanted to be helpful.

“He didn’t really run it as a business,” said Titi’s son, Justin. “He wasn’t trying to make profit. He was really just trying to help people.”

Titi was born in Jaffa in the last days of British rule in Palestine and grew up a refugee in the Gaza Strip. After studying in Egypt, Austria and Spain, he immigrated to New Jersey in 1972 and bought Noble Pharmacy a decade later.

The pharmacy became a fixture in the community, known as a place immigrants could go for help and advice, often in their native language. If they couldn’t afford medication, Titi would give it to them for free. “All different types of people from different cultures would come and they would instantly fall in love with him,” Justin said.

Active in the local Arab American community, Titi gave to charity and sent money home regularly. A Facebook [tribute](#) included dozens of stories of his generosity and mentorship. “We all lost the sweetest and the most noble man on earth,” wrote one relative.

Titi, a father of three adult children, developed symptoms of COVID-19 in late March. He died in the hospital on April 7. His wife, Rachelle, also became infected and has taken some six weeks to recover. In quarantine, the family has been unable to grieve together.

— [Noa Yachot, The Guardian](#) | *Published May 19, 2020*

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Social Worker Was a ‘Big Voice’ in His Community



(Donna Welch)

Gerald Welch

Age: 56

Occupation: Social worker and behavioral specialist

Place of Work: Opportunity Behavioral Health in Reading, Pennsylvania

Date of Death: April 15, 2020

Donna Welch had sworn she would “never, ever, *ever* get married again.” Then Gerald appeared.

They met on MySpace, and she quickly realized that “our spirits connected.” On their first date, at Donna’s house in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Gerald proposed — and Donna said yes. “It was like he came down on a bolt of lightning from heaven,” she said.

Gerald’s fiery passion and courage to speak out served him as a boardroom advocate for underperforming students in the school district, and at the St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, where he resurrected a scholarship now named in his honor.

“He had a big voice,” Donna said, “and he was not afraid to use it.” His “Families, Organizations and Communities United in Service” podcast combined Gerald’s lived experience overcoming drugs and his spirituality to support others struggling with addiction.

So even as the state’s COVID cases mounted, Gerald was a dutiful companion for his clients with severe autism — he took them to the supermarket in Lancaster and the laundromat in Lebanon. “Wherever they needed to go, he went,” Donna said. “He cared so much for them, and they loved him dearly.”

“We all did,” she added.

— [Eli Cahan](#) | *Published May 19, 2020*

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Hardworking Immigrant Realized His Dream to Practice Medicine in US



Jesus Manuel Zambrano and his son, Jesus Manuel Jr.
(The Zambrano family)

Jesus Manuel Zambrano

Age: 54

Occupation: Pediatrician

Place of Work: Private practice in Freeport, New York; attending physician at Mount Sinai South Nassau hospital

Date of Death: March 30, 2020

Jesus Manuel Zambrano studied medicine in the Dominican Republic and immigrated to New York in the 1990s.

He hustled, working in fast food and as a school bus driver between studies, his wife, Sandra, said. He completed his residency in 2010.

In the meantime, they had two children: Jesus Manuel Jr., 22, and Angelyne Ofelia, 18. Jesus Manuel Jr., who uses a wheelchair, never veered far from his father during family outings to restaurants and parks, and Holy Week vacations.

Zambrano’s bond with his son informed his care for his patients. “There was not a single day we met and talked when we didn’t talk about his son,” said Dr. Magda Mendez, a former colleague.

Zambrano spent days in private practice, Sandra said, and in the evenings treated others at the hospital, which saw COVID cases.

In early March, he felt ill. He took the next day off — a rare occurrence, Sandra said. He was taken to the hospital where he worked, where he died after a week and a half of care.

In becoming a physician in the United States, Zambrano had realized his lifelong dream. He wished the same for his family.

“He had a lot of plans for his children, a lot of dreams,” Sandra said. “He took them with him.”

— [Carmen Heredia Rodriguez, Kaiser Health News](#) | *Published May 15, 2020*

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Quick-Witted and Quick to Serve, Firefighter ‘Always Had Your Back’



(The Zerman family)

Robert Zerman

Age: 49

Occupation: Volunteer firefighter

Place of Work: Pioneer Hose Company No. 1 in Robesonia, Pennsylvania

Date of Death: April 16, 2020

Anyone who met Robert Zerman would see two things: He was devoted to firefighting and emergency medical services, and he had a quick sense of humor.

“He probably went on tens of thousands of calls,” said Anthony Tucci, CEO of the Western Berks Ambulance Association. Tucci, who knew Zerman for over three decades, added, “He always had your back, always knew his stuff.”

Most recently, Zerman was a volunteer assistant fire chief. He responded to an emergency in March in which the patient had COVID-19 symptoms.

“That was before there was really any guidance to wear PPE,” Tucci said.

Soon Zerman got sick, leading the family to suspect that he’d contracted the coronavirus on that call, Tucci said. Zerman tested positive and was hospitalized. He seemed to be improving before taking a bad turn.

Berks County, in eastern Pennsylvania, is among the state’s hardest hit, [recording around 3,500 total cases and nearly 200 deaths](#) by mid-May.

Representatives from two dozen first responder agencies lined the streets for Zerman’s funeral procession.

— [Maureen O’Hagan](#) | *Published May 19, 2020*

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Lighthearted Nurse ‘Lit Up the Room’



(Alisa Bowens)

Linda Bonaventura

Age: 45

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Wildwood Healthcare Center in Indianapolis

Date of Death: April 13, 2020

Even on bad days, Linda Bonaventura’s lighthearted sense of humor made people feel better, her sister Alisa Bowens said.

Bonaventura dedicated her career to children with special needs and seniors. She did her best to keep her spirits up while working 16-hour days.

“We like to say she *was* laughter,” Bowens said. “She lit up the room.”

In a statement, Ethan Peak, executive director of Wildwood, called Bonaventura a dedicated nurse who “would do anything for her residents and co-workers.”

As the list of patients and employees with COVID-19 grew longer at Wildwood, Bonaventura refused to live in fear, Bowens said.

Bowens recalled the day her sister confessed she was spraying herself with Lysol to kill the germs on her clothes. She did the same for a co-worker. A Wildwood spokesperson said the nursing home had sufficient personal protective equipment for employees.

The sisters, in one of their last conversations, told each other they would be at peace if death came during the pandemic. A short time later, Bonaventura tested positive for COVID-19. Just a week after coming down with a sore throat and fever, she died.

“She believed in fate,” Bowens said. “We shared that belief. But it was still a shock.”

— [Cara Anthony, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 15, 2020

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Nurse’s Death Ripples Through the Heart of an Extended Community



(Courtney Christian)

Sheila Faye Christian

Age: 66

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Care Pavilion Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Philadelphia

Date of Death: April 19, 2020

So many people are mourning the death of Sheila Christian, her daughter [set up a website](#) to comfort them all.

Christian was a longtime friend of Tina Knowles-Lawson — the mother of Beyoncé — who posted about the loss [on Instagram](#).

But Christian was also a superstar at the center where she worked for 26 years and among those who knew her. She was the kind of person who brought lunch to a new co-worker and hosted a baby shower for someone without close family, according to her daughter and a memorial board.

At the outset of the COVID crisis, Christian was not given personal protective equipment, her daughter, Courtney Christian, 30. She said her mother received a mask only in late March. A lawyer for the center acknowledged Christian’s death and said federal guidelines were followed but didn’t respond to specific questions about protective gear.

Christian was diagnosed April 2. She endured more than a week of fever, chills and coughing, but seemed to be on the mend. She had been cleared to return to work when she collapsed at home. An outpouring of grief followed, her daughter said.

“She just helped and cared for so many people,” she said. “People I had never met.”

— [JoNel Aleccia, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 15, 2020

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At Work, Church and Home, Army Veteran Gave It His All



(Shlonda Clark)

Roy Chester Coleman

Age: 64

Occupation: Emergency medical technician

Place of Work: Overton Brooks VA Medical Center in Shreveport, Louisiana

Date of Death: April 6, 2020

Shlonda Clark calls her father her “favorite superhero.”

It was one of Roy Coleman’s many roles. For the past 11 years, the Army veteran and EMT worked as a housekeeper at

the VA hospital in his hometown. He was a church deacon, Sunday school teacher and usher. He also volunteered with special-needs adults.

Roy had a big family, with three children, eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

“He was funny, he was kind, he was giving,” said Mabel Coleman, his wife of 40 years.

“If he didn’t like you, something was wrong with you,” added Clark.

Coleman fell ill March 23. After three trips to the emergency room, he was admitted March 27, with a fever and labored breathing.

“It was the last time I saw him,” Mabel said.

He tested positive for COVID-19 and died at the hospital where he had worked.

His family said he was concerned about the lack of personal protective equipment. The VA medical center said by email it “has and continues to use PPE in accordance with CDC guidelines.”

— [Katja Ridderbusch](#) | Published May 15, 2020

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Beloved Doctor Made House Calls, Treated Patients Like Family



(The Giuliano family)

Michael Giuliano

Age: 64

Occupation: Family practice physician

Place of Work: Mountainside Medical Group in Nutley, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 18, 2020

For 39 years, Michael Giuliano practiced old-fashioned family medicine.

He made house calls. He visited his patients in the hospital rather than asking another physician to check in on them. He saw generations of the same family.

“Some patients would show up here at the house,” said Giuliano’s wife, Marylu, a nurse and the office manager of his solo practice. “Patients would call and he’d say, ‘Come on over, I’ll check you out.’ He always went above and beyond.”

A father of five and a grandfather of four, Giuliano was jovial, with a quirky sense of humor and love of Peanuts characters, especially Charlie Brown. He liked to tell patients, “I’ll fix you up.”

“He treated all of his patients like family,” said Nutley Mayor Joseph Scarpelli.

When COVID-19 hit the U.S., Giuliano ordered N95 masks, his family said, but suppliers were out and sent surgical masks instead. Giuliano wore two at a time.

The week of March 16, Giuliano saw four patients with respiratory symptoms who later tested positive for COVID-19. About two weeks later, he tested positive.

Giuliano continued to see patients from home using telemedicine until he was hospitalized. He died 11 days later.

— [Michelle Crouch](#) | Published May 15, 2020

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He Tried to Reassure His Family Until the End



(Sheryl Pabatao)

Alfredo Pabatao

Age: 68

Occupation: Orderly

Place of Work: Hackensack Meridian Health Palisades Medical Center in North Bergen, New Jersey

Date of Death: March 26, 2020

After 44 years of marriage, Alfredo Pabatao still bought his wife, Susana, flowers.

“They were that type of couple that you rarely see nowadays,” their youngest daughter, Sheryl Pabatao, 30, said. “They set such a high standard for us, their kids — that may be the reason why I’m still single.” She said her father was a patient man who could fix just about anything.

The Pabataos came from Quezon City, just outside Manila, in the Philippines. Alfredo worked at a car dealership, and Sheryl said she and her siblings grew up comfortably.

But the couple wanted more for their five children, and immigrated to the United States in October 2011. “The first year that we were here, was really, really tough,” Sheryl remembered. Her oldest two siblings, already adults by the time the Pabataos’ immigration application cleared, had to stay behind.

Alfredo found a job as an orderly at a hospital in New Jersey, where he worked for nearly two decades. In mid-March, he told his family he had transported a patient with signs of COVID-19; he fell ill days later. In a statement, his employer wrote: “We have policies and procedures in place to protect our team members and patients that are all in accordance with CDC guidelines.”

Sheryl said the family’s last conversation with her father was via FaceTime, with him on his hospital bed. Connected to oxygen, he insisted he wasn’t gravely ill. He made jokes and even demonstrated yoga poses to reassure his wife and children. He died soon after.

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | Published May 15, 2020

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A ‘Selfless’ Mother Who ‘Always Had the Right Words’



(Sheryl Pabatao)

Susana Pabatao

Age: 64

Occupation: Assistant nurse

Place of Work: Bergen New Bridge Medical Center in Paramus, New Jersey

Date of Death: March 30, 2020

Susana Pabatao became a nurse in her late 40s, after her family immigrated to the United States.

It eased some of her longing for her own mother, whom she had left behind in the Philippines, her daughter, Sheryl Pabatao said. “It helped her to know that she was helping other people — something that she couldn’t do for my grandmother,” Sheryl said. Susana treated her older patients as if they were her own parents, she added.

Susana was warm, selfless and a constant source of comfort. Sheryl said, “My mom always had the right words.”

Susana’s husband, Alfredo Pabatao, began showing symptoms of COVID-19 in mid-March, and Susana became ill soon after. Sheryl, who described the two as “inseparable,” said: “When my dad got sick, it’s like part of her was not there anymore.”

Alfredo was hospitalized, and Susana spent her last days at home resting and speaking with him on FaceTime. Sheryl, who lived with her parents, said she overheard the two console each other one morning. “My mom was telling my dad, ‘We’ve gone through so many things, we’re going to get through this.’”

Alfredo died on March 26. Susana died four days later.

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | Published May 15, 2020

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Air Force Doctor Had Served in the White House



(The Medical Center of Annandale)

Steven Perez

Age: 68

Occupation: Internal medicine physician

Place of Work: Medical Center of Annandale in Annandale, Virginia

Date of Death: May 7, 2020

When George H.W. Bush announced his 1988 run for the presidency, Steven Perez was one of the doctors who gave him a clean bill of health.

An “Air Force brat” who was born in the United Kingdom, Perez served as a flight surgeon and medical director in the Air Force Medical Service Corps before practicing as a physician in the White House from 1986 to 1990, according to a statement from his family.

“It was the honor of his life,” his son, Benjamin Perez, said.

Perez went into private practice in San Antonio in the early '90s before opening his own clinic in Northern Virginia. He also taught at the University of Virginia.

According to his family, he made a promise to God and “never refused medical aid to the poor who came to his office, even accepting yams as payment on occasion.”

Perez’s family describes him as a proud grandfather to his three grandchildren (with two more on the way); he loved the University of Southern California Trojan football, the Dallas Cowboys and the Nationals.

“He could make anyone laugh, knew just what to say, and showed profound love for his friends and family,” his family wrote in an obituary. “Every person he met felt like they were the reason he was there.”

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | Published May 15, 2020

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She Jumped at Chance to Lend Her Nursing Skills to Her Beloved New York



(The Sell family)

Rosemary Sell

Age: 80

Occupation: Pediatric nurse practitioner

Place of Work: New York City public schools

Date of Death: April 17, 2020

Rosemary Sell was a New Yorker through and through. Born in Washington Heights in northern Manhattan, she went to nursing school in Greenwich Village and raised her five boys on the Lower East Side.

In the 1960s, she traveled to Berlin, where she worked as a nurse for the British army and met her future husband, Peter. A lifelong love of travel was born. Gregarious and high-energy by nature, she loved meeting new people.

“Wherever she’d go, she’d make a new friend,” said her son, also named Peter.

In later years, Sell spent much of her time in Florida. But she jumped at opportunities to lend her nursing skills to her home city and see her grandchildren and friends.

In February, she was contacted by a firm that places nurses on temporary assignments. Her children were concerned about the encroaching pandemic, especially given her age. “But they need a nurse,” she responded. She traveled to New York to fill in as a nurse at several schools citywide just as the pandemic took hold. The firm, Comprehensive Resources, did not respond to questions on protections for its contractors.

Sell began developing symptoms in mid-March, just before the citywide school closure went into effect. She returned home to Florida, where she died from pneumonia caused by COVID-19.

Before Rosemary died, she had been hatching her next adventure with a friend: to travel to India. She wanted to see the Taj Mahal.

— [Noa Yachot, *The Guardian*](#) | Published May 15, 2020

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A Hands-On Pharmacist Who Made the Big City Feel Smaller



(Zair Yasin)

Ali Yasin

Age: 67

Occupation: Pharmacist

Place of Work: New York City Pharmacy in East Village, Manhattan

Date of Death: May 4, 2020

Ali Yasin was a small-town druggist in a big city filled with impersonal, chain-store pharmacies. He found a way to operate a robust business and still be on a first-name basis with his customers. Over the years, he became their medical consultant, insurance whisperer and friend.

Jen Masser said she stumbled into Yasin’s pharmacy the first time, covered from hands to elbows in hives. “Something is happening, see someone right away,” Yasin advised. “This could be a serious disease.” He turned out to be right, encouraging her to keep seeing doctors until she finally got the proper autoimmune diagnosis.

Born in Pakistan, Yasin moved to the United States in 1979 and worked in various pharmacies before opening his own in 2001. He ran it with the help of his four sons.

In March, after serving customers in hard-hit Manhattan in his typical hands-on manner, Yasin contracted a cough and tested positive for COVID-19. By month’s end, he was in the hospital on a ventilator. He died May 4.

The storefront window of the Yasin family pharmacy is pasted with condolence cards. Son Zair Yasin said the outpouring has been immense: “I didn’t realize until he was gone how many people he touched.”

— [Kathleen Horan](#) | Published May 15, 2020

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Nurse Wouldn’t Abandon Her Patients or Let Family Worry



(The Isaacs family)

Marsha Bantle

Age: 65

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Signature Healthcare in Newburgh, Indiana

Date of Death: May 1, 2020

Marsha Bantle's family begged her to quit after a resident in the nursing home where she worked was diagnosed with COVID-19.

But Bantle wouldn't leave. "My patients can't leave their rooms, they can't see their families. They really need me right now," she told her cousin Carol Isaacs.

Bantle tried to reassure relatives she would limit her exposure, but, on April 17, her temperature spiked. Bantle, who lived alone, holed up at home. She finally called her family when it was clear she needed to be hospitalized.

"That's Marsha for you," her cousin John Isaacs said. "She didn't want us to worry."

Even while hospitalized, Bantle was selfless, said Shay Gould, the ICU nurse who cared for her. She offered to turn off her medication pump to save the nurse a trip. She asked for other patients' names to pray for them.

After about a week, Bantle had a stroke, likely brought on by the COVID-19 infection. Within days, she died.

Since April, the nursing home has had 52 positive cases and 13 COVID-19 deaths, including Bantle's. In a statement, Signature Healthcare said: "The loss of any of our residents or staff, for any reason, is devastating."

— Michelle Crouch | Published May 12, 2020

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Pharmacist, Feeling Sick, Didn't Want to Let Patients Down



(The Boynes family)

Sean Boynes

Age: 46

Occupation: Pharmacist

Place of Work: AbsoluteCare Medical Center & Pharmacy in Greenbelt, Maryland

Date of Death: April 2, 2020

When the coronavirus began circulating in the Washington metropolitan region, Sean Boynes went to work.

"Patients need their medicine," he told his wife, Nicole.

The medical center where he worked bills itself as "a medical home for the sickest of the sick"; many of its patients struggle with chronic illness and poverty. Boynes was the Greenbelt branch's first pharmacist.

He was an "incredible, loving guy," said Dr. Gregory Foti, chief of innovative operations at AbsoluteCare.

Boynes was a proud Howard University alumnus and had three degrees — a bachelor's of science in biology, a master's in exercise physiology and a doctorate in pharmacy — from the institution.

In early March, Boynes and his wife began feeling sick. Boynes didn't want to stop working but thought "taking a sick day might be OK," Nicole said. He also took a break from being a jungle gym to his eight- and 11-year-old girls. Nicole called him "Super Dad."

Nicole got better, but Sean, who had asthma, saw his breathing deteriorate.

On March 25, Nicole dropped him at the hospital doors. The medical staff confirmed COVID-19. The family never saw him again.

Foti said AbsoluteCare follows CDC recommendations, such as providing staff with face masks, and declined to comment on where Boynes became infected. He said "it was literally impossible to tell" where Boynes had contracted the virus.

To honor him, AbsoluteCare is naming the Greenbelt pharmacy after Boynes.

— [Sarah Jane Tribble, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 12, 2020

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A Spry EMT, He Made ‘the Ultimate Sacrifice’



(Toni Lorenc)

John Careccia

Age: 74

Occupation: Emergency medical technician and rescue squad chief

Place of Work: Woodbridge Township Ambulance and Rescue Squad in Iselin, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 17, 2020

“That’s not the way you throw a curveball!” John Careccia famously declared to his grandson at a family picnic, according to his daughter, Toni Lorenc. Careccia then threw the ball so wide that it broke a window in her shed.

“That’s how you throw the batter off,” he said, brushing off the mishap.

“Typical Pop-Pop,” Lorenc said. “He had so much confidence in himself.”

Careccia, who worked for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey for 30 years, harnessed his self-confidence into a second career. Inspired by two EMTs who saved his son’s life, he became a volunteer EMT in 1993. A consummate educator, he taught CPR, mentored young EMTs and gave catechism classes at his church, Lorenc said.

A spry 74, Careccia responded to 911 calls as chief of his rescue squad, a volunteer position. On a March 25 call, he evaluated a coronavirus patient, said Ed Barrett, squad president. Careccia died of COVID-19 several weeks later.

At his firehouse memorial service, Careccia was summoned over a loudspeaker for his “last call.”

“Having heard no response from Chief Careccia, we know that John has made the ultimate sacrifice,” said Steve Packer, a previous squad president. “His leadership, dedication, compassion and friendship will be greatly missed.”

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | Published May 12, 2020

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Police Officer Turned Nurse Practitioner Was Pursuing a Doctorate



(Dennis Graiani)

Kevin Graiani

Age: 56

Occupation: Family nurse practitioner

Place of Work: Rockland Medical Group in Garnerville, New York

Date of Death: March 30, 2020

Kevin Graiani always wanted to work in health care, according to Dennis Graiani, one of his three sons. But his mother told him he needed a pension, so he became a cop.

Kevin, who grew up in the Bronx, served five years on the New York City Housing Authority police force, then 15 on a suburban police force in Spring Valley, New York. He was a “brilliant officer,” said Lt. Jack Bosworth of Spring Valley.

Known for his dry sense of humor, Kevin often rattled off quotes from movies. He played bagpipes for the Rockland County Police Emerald Society, a law enforcement group. When he retired from police work, he began nursing school and became a nurse practitioner in 2018.

Kevin, who worked at a private practice, became sick on March 10 and was later diagnosed with COVID-19, Dennis

said.

He loved learning and was set to finish classes this summer for his doctorate of nursing practice, said Lynne Weissman, his professor and program director at Dominican College.

He was an “extremely bright student” with a 3.7 GPA, Weissman said.

She has nominated him for a posthumous degree.

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | *Published May 12, 2020*

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School Nurse ‘Was a Mother to Many’



(The Howard family)

Marilyn Howard

Age: 53

Occupation: School nurse

Place of Work: Spring Creek Community School in Brooklyn, New York

Date of Death: April 4, 2020

Marilyn Howard was known for her generosity and never missing a party. Born in Guyana, she came to the U.S. as a teenager. She helped raise her five brothers, putting her ambitions on hold. “She was a mother to many,” her brother Haslyn said.

In her mid-30s, she turned to her own career goals. She steadily racked up four nursing degrees and recently had begun studying to become a nurse practitioner.

Howard, who lived in Queens, New York, was a school nurse in Brooklyn, where she regularly treated children with chronic illnesses associated with poverty. The week before the pandemic shuttered schools, a fellow nurse had a fever and cough.

Days later, Howard developed the same symptoms. After initially improving, she took a sudden turn for the worse April 4. As her brother drove her to the hospital, her heart stopped. She was declared dead at the hospital.

In tribute, hundreds turned out on Zoom to mark Nine-Night — a days-long wake tradition in the Caribbean — where loved ones shared photos, sang songs and recounted Howard’s effect on their lives.

The pandemic has since ripped through Howard’s extended family, infecting at least a dozen relatives. (One cousin was hospitalized but was released and is recovering.) The family has evolved into a sprawling triage team, monitoring one another’s temperatures, delivering food, charting emergency contacts and nearby hospitals.

Howard’s brothers hope to start a foundation in her name to help aspiring nurses in the U.S. and West Indies. “The best way to honor her spirit and her memory is to bring more nurses into this world,” said her brother Rawle. “We need more Marilyn around.”

— [Noa Yachot, The Guardian](#) | *Published May 12, 2020*

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Post-Retirement, She Tirelessly Rejoined Workforce



(Bethany MacDonald)

Nancy MacDonald

Age: 74

Occupation: Receptionist

Place of Work: Orchard View Manor, a nursing home and rehabilitation center in East Providence, Rhode Island

Date of Death: April 25, 2020

Nancy MacDonald tried retiring, but couldn't make it stick.

For 20 years, she was a middle school teaching assistant and cheerleading coach. At home, she loved painting rocks and watching "Blue Bloods" and "American Idol." She was married with two adult children.

A lifelong Rhode Islander, Nancy was a people person, her daughter, Bethany MacDonald, said. "She always wanted to help others."

So, in 2017, it was natural that she'd go back to work, this time at a nursing home.

As [Orchard View's](#) COVID case count [escalated](#), MacDonald worried. Still, she kept coming in — washing and reusing her N95 respirator and having her temperature taken daily.

Tim Brown, an Orchard View spokesperson, said the facility has "extensive infection control," satisfying government guidelines. He would not say how often employees receive new N95s.

On April 13, MacDonald began coughing. By April 16, she was hospitalized. Her COVID test came back positive. She died 10 days later — almost a week after her last conversation with her daughter.

"I said, 'Mama, we love you,'" Bethany said. "The last words she said to me were, 'I love you, too.'"

— [Shefali Luthra, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 12, 2020

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Despite Danger, Semi-Retired Nurse Kept Caring for ER Patients



(The Miles family)

Sheena Miles

Age: 60

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Scott Regional Hospital in Morton, Mississippi

Date of Death: May 1, 2020

At age 60, Sheena Miles was semi-retired. She usually worked every other weekend, but as COVID-19 emerged in Mississippi, she worked four weekends in a row from mid-March to mid-April.

"I've got a duty," she told her son, Tom Miles.

The economy where she lived is dominated by poultry plants, and the county has been a coronavirus hot spot. Sheena was diligent with protective gear, wearing her mask and doubling up on gloves, Tom said. She stayed home when she wasn't working.

"Losing Sheena has been a tragic loss, as she had been a part of our hospital for 25 years," said Heather Davis, a hospital administrator.

Sheena took ill on Easter Sunday. By Thursday, Tommy Miles, her husband of 43 years, drove her to the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson.

Two long weeks passed. The family was allowed to say goodbye in person, and on their way into her room, an ICU nurse told them that years ago Sheena had cared for his infant daughter. "Your mom saved her life," the nurse said.

"That was a little comfort in the storm," Sheena's son said.

— [Michaela Gibson Morris](#) | Published May 12, 2020

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A Nurse Who Was Living Her Dream of Working in the US



(Venus Donasco-Delfin)

Anjanette Miller

Age: 48

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Community First Medical Center and Kindred Chicago Lakeshore in Chicago, and Bridgeway Senior Living in Bensenville, Illinois

Date of Death: April 14, 2020

As a child, Anjanette Miller dreamed of becoming a nurse in the U.S. She studied in her native Philippines and worked briefly in Saudi Arabia before fulfilling her wish in 2001.

Miller settled in Chicago and worked as a supervising nurse at three facilities. Her sister, Venus Donasco-Delfin, said Miller got along well with co-workers who shared her work ethic.

“At work, I think, she was strict, but beyond work, she’s a great friend,” Donasco-Delfin said. One of five siblings, she was the “pillar of the family” and supported relatives back home.

“I studied psychology for two years,” Donasco-Delfin said, “but she kept calling me [in the Philippines] and said, ‘No, Venus. ... You have to pursue nursing. You will make a difference.’” Donasco-Delfin, now in Canada, became a nurse.

Miller started feeling sick in mid-March and was diagnosed with COVID-19 in early April. She self-isolated, chronicling her illness on YouTube and Facebook. She was hospitalized April 5 and died nine days later.

Miller had hoped to retire to the Philippines and pursue her other passion, filmmaking. Last year she traveled back home to shoot scenes for a project. “The movie she was making is about her life story,” Donasco-Delfin said. “But it’s not finished yet.”

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | Published May 12, 2020

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He Took the Time to Put Patients at Ease



(Holy Name Medical Center)

Jesus Villaluz

Age: 75

Occupation: Patient transport worker

Place of Work: Holy Name Medical Center in Teaneck, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 3, 2020

After Jesus Villaluz died from COVID-19 complications, [colleagues lined the hallway](#) at Holy Name Medical Center in Teaneck, New Jersey, to say goodbye. They’d never done that for anyone else.

“Jesus knew many and meant a lot to all of us, so this gesture felt like the right thing to do,” said hospital spokesperson Nicole Urena.

The hospital, and [surrounding Bergen County](#), have been hit hard by the pandemic. By May 8, Holy Name had treated more than 6,000 COVID patients, 181 of whom died.

Villaluz worked at Holy Name for 27 years. In a Facebook [post](#), the hospital memorialized Villaluz’s generosity: He once won a raffle and shared the winnings with colleagues, an anecdote New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy repeated at a

[news conference](#). Family members declined requests for an interview.

Co-worker Hossien Dahdouli said Villaluz's compassion for patients was exemplary. He never rushed anyone, took the time to chat with patients and was always concerned for their privacy and safety, Dahdouli said.

Years ago, after Dahdouli had a sad day caring for deteriorating ICU patients, he asked Villaluz why he always appeared so happy.

"He said, 'My worst day at work is better than someone's best day as a patient.'"

— [Anna Almendrala, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 12, 2020

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Family Vacations and Reggae Gave Rhythm to His Life



(Nina Batayola)

Don Ryan Batayola

Age: 40

Occupation: Occupational therapist

Place of Work: South Mountain Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center in Vauxhall, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 4, 2020

April 4 was the day Don and Nina Batayola had planned to leave for London on a 10-day European vacation. Instead, that was the day Don died of COVID-19.

The Springfield, New Jersey, couple loved to travel — on their own or with their children, Zoie, 10, and Zeth, 8. Disney World. Road trips to Canada. Every year for a week they would savor the beach on North Carolina's Outer Banks.

Don's love of reggae music prompted a trip to Jamaica to visit Bob Marley's birthplace.

The Batayolas, both occupational therapists, moved to New Jersey from the Philippines 13 years ago to pursue their careers.

"He loved to help," Nina said. "He had such the ability to make everybody smile or laugh."

Don worked with at least one patient and a handful of colleagues who subsequently tested positive for COVID-19, and in late March, he developed symptoms. Nina came home from work for lunch on March 31 to find him struggling to breathe. She dialed 911.

He was hospitalized, then she also developed COVID symptoms. Self-isolating at home, Nina talked with Don once a day. She thought he seemed stronger but, on the fourth day, his heart suddenly stopped.

— [Michelle Andrews](#) | Published May 8, 2020

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Even on 'the Saddest Day ... She Could Make You Laugh'



(Kim Bruner)

Brittany Bruner-Ringo

Age: 32

Occupation: Licensed vocational nurse

Place of Work: Silverado Beverly Place in Los Angeles

Date of Death: April 20, 2020

When it was Brittany Bruner-Ringo's turn to pick the family vacation, it was always New Orleans. A city so full of life.

And that is how family described the 32-year-old who left the Oklahoma plains for the excitement of Southern California.

"She always made the best of things," her mother, Kim Bruner, said. "It could be the saddest day, and she could make you laugh."

Bruner-Ringo worked at a dementia care center. On March 19, she admitted a patient flown in from New York. She suspected he might have COVID-19, and she was nervous. For fear of frightening the patients, she hadn't been allowed to wear a mask or gloves, she told her mom by phone that night. (A spokesperson from her employer said, "We have no issues in our environment using appropriate masking and gloves and have followed CDC guidelines throughout this pandemic. We have always had adequate PPE to protect our residents and associates.")

The following day, the patient grew worse. Bruner-Ringo checked into a hotel to isolate from her roommate. She later tested positive for COVID-19, but when she developed symptoms did not complain — even to her mom: "She would say, 'I'm fine. I'm going to beat this. Don't worry about me.'"

Bruner, a veteran nurse herself, called the hotel front desk for help getting an ambulance to her daughter. She had just hung up with her daughter, who insisted she was fine, while struggling to breathe.

— [Samantha Young, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 8, 2020

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He and His Wife Shared a Lust for Travel — and a COVID Diagnosis



(LaKita Bush)

Joshua Bush

Age: 30

Occupation: Nurse and nursing student

Place of Work: Benton House of Aiken in Aiken, South Carolina

Date of Death: April 17, 2020

Joshua Bush never let his wife, LaKita, forget that she was five hours late for their first date.

"He never held back telling the truth," LaKita said, with a doleful laugh.

They met online in 2011, each attracted to the other's lust for travel. For Joshua's 30th birthday, they took a cruise to Bermuda. He yearned to go farther afield to Tokyo to revel over anime.

Joshua began his nursing career after high school, eventually ending up at Benton House of Aiken, an assisted living facility. Joshua and LaKita, who works in human resources for a hospital, thought it was allergy-related when they both fell ill in late March. Benton House had no confirmed COVID cases at the time, LaKita said. Even still, the staff was taking precautions.

A doctor prescribed Joshua flu medication, but his symptoms — fever and aches but no cough — worsened, and he was admitted to a hospital in Augusta, Georgia, on April 4.

"That was the last time I saw him alive," LaKita said.

Over the next few days, both tested positive for the coronavirus. Joshua was sedated in the hospital for two weeks and died on April 17. LaKita recovered at home.

Joshua was earning a bachelor's degree in nursing at the University of South Carolina-Aiken. May would have marked the couple's fifth anniversary.

— [Sarah Varney, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 8, 2020

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Her Sudden Death Blindsided Husband and Autistic Son



(Vincent Carmello)

Karen Carmello

Age: 57

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Maryhaven Center of Hope in Port Jefferson Station, New York

Date of Death: April 16, 2020

Karen Carmello had an intimate understanding of working with intellectually disabled patients.

Her 26-year-old son, Steven, has autism. According to her husband, Vincent, the two spoke by phone every day. Steven would recall exactly what he did, and Karen listened intently.

“She could do no wrong in his eyes, ever,” Vincent said. “It’s a very special bond, but it’s one that she earned.”

Sharing the news of her death was shattering: “It was the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do — letting him know.”

When Karen took ill, she discovered that a patient in her ward had tested positive for COVID-19. She was hospitalized March 23. Eight days later, she sent Vincent her last text, at 2:17 a.m., before going to the ICU.

On April 16, hospital staff called and asked whether Vincent would be comfortable signing a do-not-resuscitate order. He hadn’t been able to see his wife, so he didn’t completely grasp how grave her condition was.

“I thought, ‘OK, this must be a formality,’” he said. “I authorized it. And I got a call within two hours that she passed. I was stunned.”

— *Shoshana Dubnow, Kaiser Health News* | Published May 8, 2020

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His Facebook Posts Left Clues of a Tragic Timeline



(Felicia Dodson-Hill)

Maurice Dotson

Age: 51

Occupation: Certified nursing assistant

Place of Work: West Oaks Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Austin, Texas

Date of Death: April 17, 2020

Maurice Dotson’s sister knew something was wrong when her older brother didn’t post his daily Facebook update.

“We knew he was good as long as he posted every morning,” Felicia Dodson-Hill, of Jacksonville, Arkansas, said.

Dotson, 51 — a certified nursing assistant for 25 years at the West Oaks Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Austin — had begun caring for COVID-19 patients.

He sounded positive on Facebook, posting on March 30: “We are going through scary, difficult times, but better days are coming.”

Days later, family in Arkansas couldn’t reach him.

“We had been trying to get in contact with him since April 1st,” his sister said. “On April 3rd, he posted that he had to go to the hospital — that he was not feeling good.”

Dodson-Hill said the hospital sent him home. Her mother finally reached him on April 6 or 7.

“He told my mom he didn’t have the energy to barely talk,” Dodson-Hill said.

Dawunna Wilson, a cousin from Hazen, Arkansas, said Maurice called an ambulance on April 8. Results from his coronavirus test done at the hospital came back positive the next day. “From there, it was pretty much downhill,” Wilson said.

— [Sharon Jayson](#) | *Published May 5, 2020*

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Community Salutes Nurse Who Loved Baseball



(Leigh Ann Lewis)

Barbara Finch

Age: 63

Occupation: Licensed practical nurse

Place of Work: Southern Virginia Regional Medical Center in Emporia, Virginia

Date of Death: March 29, 2020

When Barbara Finch got excited, she’d scrunch her hands into fists and wave them around like a kid at Christmas. She did it when the Atlanta Braves scored, or while watching her grandkids play baseball, her No. 1 passion outside work.

Finch spent her 37-year nursing career in the emergency department of the hospital in Emporia, Virginia (population of about 5,000), where one of her four children, Leigh Ann Lewis, worked as an EMT.

Lewis knew her mother was well liked: Patients she transported from the hospital would rave that Finch had been sweet and compassionate.

Finch fell ill on March 17 and died in an ICU 12 days later. As a hearse carried her casket to the graveyard, Lewis said, people lined the way at driveway mailboxes, churches and stores, holding signs that read, “We love you,” “Praying for you,” “Hugs.” At her hospital, employees released balloons to the sky.

“It seemed like, in our area, she knew everybody — either she worked with them, or they were a patient of hers at some point,” Lewis said. “It was a very, very large outpour of love and comfort and solidarity.”

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | *Published May 8, 2020*

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‘He Loved to Work,’ With No Plans to Retire



(Giancarlo Pattugalan)

Tomas Pattugalan

Age: 70

Occupation: Internal medicine physician

Place of Work: Private practice in Jamaica, Queens, New York

Date of Death: March 29, 2020

Tomas Pattugalan’s kids had been encouraging him to retire. Even after 45 years of medicine, Pattugalan wasn’t ready to slow down.

“He loved his patients. He loved to work. He loved to help others,” said Giancarlo, his son. “He had an enormous capacity to give of himself.”

A father of three, Pattugalan grew up in the Philippines, immigrating to the U.S. in the 1970s. He was a devout Catholic

— attending Mass weekly — and “karaoke master,” Giancarlo said.

In early March, Pattugalan began testing patients for COVID-19. His medical history, including a family history of strokes and high blood pressure, heightened his own risk. So after tests of two patients returned positive, he got tested himself. On March 24, he learned he had the coronavirus.

“He made a joke and said Prince Charles had tested [positive] too, and he was sharing royalty,” Giancarlo said. “He was making light of it, not trying to get any of us worried.”

Pattugalan had a cough. Then came wheezing. His oxygen levels dropped. He tried hydroxychloroquine, an experimental treatment touted by President Donald Trump that has yielded mixed results. Nothing helped.

On March 29, Pattugalan agreed to seek hospital care. He died that day.

— [Shefali Luthra, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 8, 2020

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Says Widow Battling Cancer: ‘He Was My Backbone’



(Melissa Castro Santos)

Darrin Santos

Age: 50

Occupation: Transportation supervisor

Place of Work: NewYork-Presbyterian Westchester Behavioral Health Center in White Plains, New York

Date of Death: April 4, 2020

Melissa Castro Santos had just started a new treatment for multiple myeloma when her husband, Darrin, got sick.

For nearly two weeks, he isolated in their bedroom, but after he began gasping for air, he went to the hospital. He died of COVID-19 days later.

“It’s just unbelievable,” Castro Santos said.

As a transportation supervisor, Santos delivered health care workers and equipment between hospitals in the New York metropolitan area. He loved his job, Castro Santos said, and was known to drive doctors wherever and whenever they were needed, through heavy traffic and snowstorms.

Castro Santos, who has been battling cancer since 2012, said her husband doted on their three teenagers, all avid athletes. He arranged his work schedule to attend as many of their games as possible. When he couldn’t make it, she would call him on FaceTime so he could catch glimpses of the action.

Unable to hold a funeral, they arranged for burial five days after Santos died. Friends lined the streets in cars in a show of support as the family drove to and from the cemetery.

Now Castro Santos is confronting cancer without her husband. “He was my backbone. He was the one who took me to chemotherapy and appointments.”

— [Anna Jean Kaiser, The Guardian](#) | Published May 8, 2020

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An Animal Lover Who Loved Aerospace, She Died Alone at Home



(Aubree Farmer)

Lisa Ewald

Age: 53

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit

Date of Death: April 1, 2020

Lisa Ewald was a nurse to many living things, human and otherwise.

When her neighbor Alexis Fernandez's border collie had a stomach blockage, Ewald hooked the dog up to an IV four times a day. "She was this dedicated nurse who nursed my dog back to health," Fernandez said.

Ewald also loved gardening, aerospace and comic book conventions.

Ewald told Fernandez that a patient she had treated later tested positive for COVID-19, and that she was not wearing a mask at the time. Two days later, after seeing the patient, she got sick. After delays in accessing a test, she learned on March 30 that she was infected with the coronavirus.

A hospital spokesperson acknowledged that staff who treat coronavirus patients have a higher risk of exposure, but said there was "no way to confirm" how a staff member contracted the virus.

On March 31, Ewald didn't answer when Fernandez texted her. The next day, Fernandez and a hospital nurse went to Ewald's home to check on her and found her unresponsive on the couch.

"I said, 'Aren't you going to go take her pulse or anything?'" Fernandez said. "The nurse just said, 'She's gone.'"

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | *Published May 5, 2020*

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An Ardent EMT Who Seemed to Have Nine Lives



(Ben Geiger)

Scott Geiger

Age: 47

Occupation: Emergency medical technician

Place of Work: Atlantic Health System in Mountainside and Warren, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 13, 2020

Scott Geiger wasn't always enthusiastic about school, but at age 16 he brought home a tome the size of two phone books. It was a manual for emergency medical technicians, and he devoured it, said his younger brother, Ben Geiger.

Scott was certified as an EMT at 17. He never married or had kids, but did not seem to miss those things.

"He was so focused on being an EMT and helping people in their most vulnerable and desperate moments," Ben said. "That's really what made him feel good."

Scott loved playing pool each week with friends. He was a loyal New York Jets football fan, content to joke about their follies and watch them lose. He was quiet. And he seemed to have nine lives, his brother said, surviving hospitalizations for epilepsy as a kid and blood cancer around age 40.

When the coronavirus began to tear a path through northern New Jersey, he faced his EMT work with resolve. He downplayed his symptoms when he first fell ill in late March, but wound up spending 17 days on a ventilator before he died. The family has had to mourn separately, with the brothers' father, who lived with Scott, in quarantine, and their mother confined to her room in a nursing home that has COVID-19 cases.

— [Christina Jewett, Kaiser Health News](#) | *Published May 5, 2020*

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Caring Nurse 'Always Put Herself Last'



(Lisa Lococo)

Theresa Lococo

Age: 68

Occupation: Pediatric nurse

Place of Work: Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn, New York

Date of Death: March 27, 2020

Theresa Lococo spent most of her life at the hospital, working as a pediatric nurse for almost 48 years.

“There wasn’t a day that goes by she wouldn’t come home and tell me about her patients,” said her daughter, Lisa Lococo. “She had to be forced to take her vacation days.”

New York City Mayor [Bill de Blasio publicly saluted her](#) lifelong service to New Yorkers, saying, “She gave her life helping others.”

Theresa had dogs — “sometimes too many,” Lisa said — and lived with her son, Anthony, in the home she owned for decades. She loved cooking and watching cooking shows, reading and following soap operas.

Theresa wasn’t tested for COVID-19. But Kings County Hospital, in Brooklyn, was [hit hard](#) by the coronavirus.

Days before dying, she described nausea. Friends recalled a cough. Her supervisor encouraged her to stay home, her daughter said.

Lisa called her mother on March 27, just as Anthony was dialing 911 for help.

“She always put others first,” Lisa said. “She always put herself last.”

— [Shefali Luthra, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 5, 2020

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He Was Full of Life and Planning for the Future



(The Luna family)

Felicitissimo “Tom” Luna

Age: 62

Occupation: Emergency room nurse

Place of Work: Trinitas Regional Medical Center in Elizabeth, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 9, 2020

Tom Luna was a joker, a lively and outgoing man who thrived on the fast-paced and varied action of the emergency room. He also adored his three daughters, something clear to all who knew him.

“Tom was a fantastic emergency nurse. He was well liked and loved by his peers,” Gerard Muench, administrative director of the Trinitas emergency department, said in a statement. “His greatest love was for his wife and daughters, who he was very proud of.”

His oldest daughter, Gabrielle, 25, followed his path to become an ER nurse. When Tom fell ill with the coronavirus, he was admitted to the hospital where she works. At the end of her 12-hour night shifts, she made sure he had breakfast and helped him change his clothes. She propped a family photo next to his bed.

Tom’s wife, Kit, also a nurse, said that when some of his symptoms appeared to let up, they talked about him recovering at home. He was a planner, she said, and was already talking about their next family vacation, maybe to Spain.

— [Christina Jewett, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 5, 2020

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Air Force Veteran Went ‘Above and Beyond for Patients’



Michael Marceaux and his wife, Dunia, when he graduated from nursing school in 2018 (Drake Marceaux)

Michael Marceaux

Age: 49

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Christus Highland Medical Center and Brentwood Hospital in Shreveport, Louisiana

Date of Death: April 16, 2020

After Michael Marceaux retired from the Air Force, he went back to school. In 2018 he launched a new career as an emergency room nurse.

“Everyone who worked with him said he was so happy,” said Drake Marceaux, one of his four sons. “He was willing to go above and beyond for patients.”

As the coronavirus spread throughout Louisiana, Michael developed a cough and fever. Soon afterward, he tested positive for COVID-19.

“He didn’t seem too worried,” Drake said. “He just wanted to make sure not to give it to other people.”

A spokesperson with Christus Health said Michael would be missed for “how he always had a positive attitude, even after a hard shift. His laughter brought joy to others.” The spokesperson declined to answer questions about workplace safety conditions.

Drake said he wanted his father to be remembered for how much he was loved.

His funeral was livestreamed on Facebook. “At one point, there were 2,000 viewers watching his service,” Drake said. “As much as he didn’t want attention, it gravitated toward him.”

— [Victoria Knight, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 5, 2020

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She Loved to Give Gifts and Never Forgot Her Hometown



(Donald Jay Marcos)

Celia Lardizabal Marcos

Age: 61

Occupation: Telemetry charge nurse

Place of Work: CHA Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center in Los Angeles

Date of Death: April 17, 2020

Whenever she traveled to her hometown of Tagudin in the Philippines, Celia Lardizabal Marcos showered family with gifts and delighted in planning weekend outings for everyone, said her eldest son, Donald.

And when she returned home to California, she brought presents for her sons. “She always thought of how her family could be happy,” he said.

Trained as a nurse in her home country, Marcos immigrated to the United States in 2001 and settled in Los Angeles. Three years later, she became a telemetry charge nurse, a specialist who tracks patients’ vital signs using high-tech equipment.

On April 3, she was one of three nurses who responded after a suspected COVID patient went into cardiac arrest.

Wearing a surgical mask, she intubated the patient. Three days later, she had a headache, body aches and difficulty breathing.

Her symptoms worsened, and she was admitted April 15 to the hospital where she had worked for 16 years. That was the last time Donald spoke to his mother. Two days later, she went into cardiac arrest and died that night.

Her sons plan to honor her wishes to be cremated and buried in Tagudin, alongside her parents.

— [Christina M. Oriel, Asian Journal](#) | Published May 5, 2020

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‘Hero Among Heroes,’ Doctor Cared for Generations of Patients



Francis Molinari (right) with his siblings (from left) Janice, Albert and Lisa (Lisa Molinari)

Francis Molinari

Age: 70

Occupation: Physician

Place of Work: Private practice in Belleville, New Jersey; privileges at Clara Maass Medical Center

Date of Death: April 9, 2020

In late March, Dr. Francis “Frankie” Molinari told his sister Lisa he was “down for the count,” with chills, fever and trouble breathing.

“Frankie, you know what you have,” she recalled telling him.

“Yes.”

Two days later, he collapsed at home and was rushed to Clara Maass Medical Center. Colleagues stayed by his side as he succumbed to COVID-19.

“We take solace in the fact that he was cared for by colleagues and friends who deeply loved and respected him,” his sister Janice wrote in a blog. “He died a hero among heroes.”

Molinari, a New Jersey native who was married with an adult daughter, was the oldest of four siblings. His sisters describe him as a positive guy who loved music, fishing and teasing people with tall tales: He went to medical school in Bologna, Italy, and he liked to say he had played pinochle with the pope.

Molinari practiced medicine for over four decades, caring for generations of patients in the same family. His family suspects he contracted the coronavirus at his private practice.

“A friend had once described us as four different legs of the same table,” Janice wrote. “Now I’m stuck on the fact that we are only a three-legged table. Less beautiful, less sturdy. Broken.”

— [Laura Ungar, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 5, 2020

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5-Foot-Tall ‘Fireball’ Was a Prankster to Her Sons



(Josh Banago)

Celia Yap-Banago

Age: 69

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Research Medical Center in Kansas City, Missouri

Date of Death: April 21, 2020

Celia Yap-Banago was a 5-foot-tall “fireball,” said one co-worker. She had moved to the U.S. from the Philippines in 1970 and worked for nearly 40 years for the HCA Midwest Health system. Her family said she was planning for retirement.

Her son Josh said she showed her love through practical jokes: “You knew she loved you if she was yelling at you or if she was pranking you.”

“She was very outspoken,” said Charlene Carter, a fellow nurse. “But I later learned that’s a really good quality to have, as a nurse, so you can advocate for your patients and advocate for yourself.”

In March, Yap-Banago treated a patient who later tested positive for COVID-19. Carter said Yap-Banago was not given personal protective equipment because she was not working in an area designed for COVID patients. She spent her final days in isolation to protect others.

A spokesperson for HCA Midwest Health said that medical staff received adequate personal protective equipment in line with CDC guidelines.

Josh said she spoke with reverence of her patients and their families. “She was always focused on the family as a whole, and that the family was taken care of, not just the patient in the bed,” he said.

— [Alex Smith, KCUR](#) | Published May 5, 2020

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In Ministry and Rescue Missions, ‘He Put His All Into It’



(The Birmingham Family)

Billy Birmingham Sr.

Age: 69

Occupation: Emergency medical technician

Place of Work: Kansas City Missouri Fire Department

Date of Death: April 13, 2020

Bill Birmingham Jr. fondly remembers the year his father took on a new career. The whole family studied, even acting out scenes to ensure Billy Birmingham Sr., a minister, was ready for his emergency medical technician exam.

“He put his all into it,” the son recalled.

Billy Birmingham passed the test. And from the late 1990s on, he served as an EMT and a minister.

His family rallied again for his doctorate in pastoral theology. During nearly four decades as a minister, he founded two churches.

“He had a heart for other people,” his son said. “Whatever he could do for other people, he would do it.”

As an EMT with the Kansas City Fire Missouri Department, he was exposed to the novel coronavirus. The cough came in March.

“I’m just tired.’ That’s what he kept saying,” his son said. His dad went to the hospital twice. The first time he told the staff about his symptoms and underlying health conditions, then they sent him home.

The second time he arrived in an ambulance. Just over two weeks later, his final hours arrived.

Hospital staff set up a video chat so his family could see him one last time.

— [Cara Anthony, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 1, 2020

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Jovial Man Trained Scores of Doctors in Obstetrics, Gynecology and Kindness



(Ashley Ulker)

Luis Caldera-Nieves

Age: 63

Occupation: OB-GYN doctor

Place of Work: University of Miami and Jackson health systems in Miami

Date of Death: April 8, 2020

“*Somos felices.*” That was Dr. Luis Caldera-Nieves’ signature signoff after a cesarean section or patient visit or at the end of a difficult shift. “We’re happy,” he meant, and often, when he was around, it was true.

Caldera-Nieves, a popular OB-GYN, trained scores of doctors and helped bring thousands of babies into the world in his 25 years at the University of Miami and Jackson health systems.

Born in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, he worked as an Air Force doctor before joining UM, said longtime co-worker Dr. Jaime Santiago. Caldera-Nieves was so devoted to his patients that he often gave them his private phone number — and his wife’s, Santiago said.

Because he was so jovial, he earned the nickname “the Puerto Rican Santa Claus,” Santiago said.

“He was truly loved and admired by everyone who worked with him, and will be remembered for his humor and never-ending positive energy,” said Dr. Jean-Marie Stephan, who trained under Caldera-Nieves.

In a statement, UM and Jackson confirmed Caldera-Nieves died from complications of COVID-19 and said they “grieve the loss of our esteemed and beloved colleague.” He is survived by his wife and six adult children.

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | *Published May 1, 2020*

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A Cluster of Illness Robs Community of Another Fearless EMT



(Vito Cicchetti)

Kevin Leiva

Age: 24

Occupation: Emergency medical technician

Place of Work: Saint Clare’s Health in Passaic, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 7, 2020

When Kevin Leiva died of COVID-19 in early April, it was a second crushing loss to his close-knit team of EMT workers. Their colleague, Israel Tolentino Jr., had died one week before.

“People were scared that everyone was going to die from it,” said Vito Cicchetti, a director at Saint Clare’s Health, where the men worked. “After Izzy died, we all started getting scared for Kevin.”

Leiva, [according to an obituary](#), “was always worried about his crew.” He was “very proud” of his work and was recalled to have said “becoming an EMT was an act of God.”

He met his wife, Marina, online while they were in high school. She moved a thousand miles to build a life with him. He loved spending time at their home, playing guitar and tending to his tegu lizards, AJ and Blue.

As COVID-19 ramped up, the station’s three ambulances each handled up to 15 dispatches a shift, roughly double the usual number. In a busy 12-hour shift, EMTs often responded to calls continuously, stopping only to decontaminate themselves and the truck.

Leiva “always had a joke” that helped to defuse stressful situations and bring his co-workers together, Cicchetti said.

— [Michelle Andrews](#) | Published May 1, 2020

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Firefighting and ‘Helping People’ Were in His Blood



(The Terre Haute Fire Department)

John Schoffstall

Age: 41

Occupation: Paramedic and firefighter

Place of Work: Terre Haute Fire Department in Terre Haute, Indiana

Date of Death: April 12, 2020

John Schoffstall grew up around firehouses, and it was at his own firehouse in Terre Haute, Indiana, that he was exposed to the coronavirus.

A paramedic and firefighter with the Terre Haute Fire Department for almost 12 years, Schoffstall died April 12 at age 41. Deputy Chief Glen Hall said investigations by the county health department and his own department “determined John contracted the virus from another firefighter in the firehouse.” Four other firefighters “had symptoms but none progressed.”

“We respond every day to potential COVID patients,” Hall said.

Jennifer Schoffstall, his wife of 18 years, said her husband went to the hospital March 28.

“His breathing was so bad in the ER, they just decided to keep him,” she said. “He regressed from there.”

Hall said Schoffstall’s “biggest hobby was his family,” with a son, 17, and a daughter, 13.

Schoffstall’s father had been a volunteer firefighter, Jennifer said, and her husband signed up for the New Goshen Volunteer Fire Department when he turned 18.

“He loved the fire service and everything about it,” she said. “He loved helping people.”

— [Sharon Jayson](#) | Published May 1, 2020

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Boston Nurse, a Former Bus Driver, Was a Champion for Education



(Teadris Pope)

Rose Taldon

Age: 63

Occupation: Nurse

Place of Work: New England Baptist Hospital in Boston

Date of Death: April 12, 2020

Rose Taldon was just 5 feet tall. But when she bellowed out the window, her kids ran right home.

“She didn’t take any crap,” said her daughter, Teadris Pope.

Taldon raised three children with her husband on the street where she grew up in Dorchester, Boston. She was respected as a strong Black woman, earning a nursing degree while working in public transit for 23 years. Described as stern, she still was quick to tickle her eight grandkids.

Taldon was generous: Even as she lay in a hospital in April, exhausted from the coronavirus, she arranged to pay bills

for an out-of-work friend, her daughter said.

It's unclear whether Taldon caught the virus at her hospital, designated for non-COVID patients. Hospital officials said three patients and 22 staff have tested positive.

Once her mother was hospitalized, Pope couldn't visit. On Easter morning, a doctor called at 2 a.m., offering to put Taldon on a video call.

"I just talked until I had no words," Pope said. "I was just telling her, 'We're so proud of you. You worked so hard raising us. ... You've gone through a hell of a fight.'"

An hour later, her mother was gone.

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | Published May 1, 2020

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Unflappable First Responder With an Ever-Ready Smile



(Vito Cicchetti)

Israel Tolentino Jr.

Age: 33

Occupation: Emergency medical technician and firefighter

Place of Work: Saint Clare's Health and the Passaic Fire Department, both in Passaic, New Jersey

Date of Death: March 31, 2020

When Israel Tolentino Jr. arrived for his EMT shift one morning in March, he seemed fine. Then he got a headache. Then a fever came on, and he was sent home, said Vito Cicchetti, a director at Saint Clare's Health.

Izzy, as he was called, was an EMT who fulfilled his dream to become a firefighter. In 2018, the former Marine took a job with the Passaic Fire Department but kept up shifts at Saint Clare's.

He was husband to Maria Vazquez, whom he'd met at church, according to [nj.com](#). They had two young children.

The work pace could be brutal during the pandemic. In a 12-hour shift, Tolentino and his partner were dispatched to one emergency after another, each typically lasting under an hour but requiring nearly that long to decontaminate their gear and truck.

Izzy died in hospital care. The coronavirus tore through his EMT team. Most eventually recovered. But his friend and co-worker Kevin Leiva also died.

Izzy's unflappable, cheerful presence is missed, Cicchetti said: "No matter how mad you were, he'd come up with a smile and you'd be chuckling to yourself."

Cicchetti hasn't replaced either man: "I don't know if I'm ready for that yet."

— [Michelle Andrews](#) | Published May 1, 2020

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Their Decade-Long Dream Marriage Ends in Nightmare



(The Detroit Fire Department)

Capt. Franklin Williams

Age: 57

Occupation: Firefighter and medical first responder

Place of Work: Detroit Fire Department in Detroit

Date of Death: April 8, 2020

Capt. Franklin Williams stood at the altar on his wedding day and pretended to hunt for the ring. He patted his chest, then his pants legs and looked up at his soon-to-be wife with a million-dollar smile.

He was always clowning and “so silly,” said Shanita Williams, his wife, recalling how he wanted to make her laugh. Williams, 57, died from complications of the novel coronavirus on April 8 — one month before the couple’s 10-year wedding anniversary.

Williams had been on an emergency call with a verified COVID patient before falling ill, according to Detroit Fire Department Chief Robert Distelrath. He died in the line of duty.

Crews are equipped with personal protective equipment including a gown, N95 mask and gloves. But it’s easy for a mask to slip — “when you’re giving [chest] compressions, your mask isn’t staying in place all the time,” said Thomas Gehart, president of the Detroit Fire Fighters Association.

When Williams fell sick on March 24, he moved to the guest bedroom and never returned to work.

“I’m thankful and thank God for having him in my life,” Shanita said, adding that she keeps hoping this is a nightmare and she’ll soon wake up.

— [Sarah Jane Tribble, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published May 1, 2020

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A 9/11 First Responder, He Answered the Call During the Pandemic



(The Valley Stream Fire Department)

Mike Field

Age: 59

Occupation: Volunteer emergency medical technician

Place of Work: Village of Valley Stream on New York’s Long Island

Date of Death: April 8, 2020

Mike Field had a strong sense of civic duty. An emergency medical technician, he was a first responder with the New York Fire Department (FDNY) on 9/11. He was also a member of his community’s all-volunteer fire department since 1987.

After he retired from FDNY in 2002, he took a job making and posting street signs with his local public works department. He continued to volunteer with Valley Stream’s fire department and mentoring the junior fire department. When he wasn’t responding to emergencies or training future emergency technicians, he led a Boy Scout troop and volunteered for animal causes.

“Here’s somebody who cares about the community and cares about its people,” said Valley Stream’s mayor, Ed Fare, who had known Mike since the seventh grade.

Stacey Field, Mike’s wife, said he found his calling early, after his own father experienced a heart attack. “When the fire department EMTs came and helped his dad, he decided that’s what he wanted to do,” she said.

Their three sons — Steven, 26; Richie, 22; and Jason, 19 — have followed in their father’s footsteps. Steven and Richie are EMTs in New York; Jason plans on training to become one as well. All three volunteer at the same fire station their father did.

In late March, Mike and fellow volunteer responders were called to an emergency involving a patient showing symptoms of COVID-19. Field died on April 8.

— [Sharon Jayson](#) | Published April 29, 2020

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Nurse Fought for His Life in Same ICU Where He Cared for Patients



(Romielyn Guillermo)

Ali Dennis Guillermo

Age: 44

Occupation: Nurse

Place of Work: Long Island Community Hospital in East Patchogue, New York

Date of Death: April 7, 2020

In 2004, Ali Dennis Guillermo, his wife, Romielyn, and their daughter came to New York from the Philippines to find a better life.

Everything fell into place. The former nursing instructor landed a job at Long Island Community Hospital, often working in intensive care or the emergency room. He enjoyed the intensity of ER work, his wife said. As years passed, the couple had two sons and settled into a close-knit Philippine community.

As COVID-19 emerged, Guillermo was posted to the step-down floor, working with patients transitioning out of intensive care.

A lot of the nurses on his floor had gotten sick with the virus, his wife said, and “everybody was scared.”

And then, Guillermo felt achy, with a fever that soared to 102. He went to the hospital and X-rays were taken, but he was sent home. Within days, his blood oxygen level plummeted.

“My nails are turning blue,” he told his wife. “You should take me to the ER.”

He was admitted that night in late March, and they never spoke again.

In the ICU unit where he’d often worked, Guillermo was intubated and treated. Nearly two weeks later, he died.

— [Michelle Andrews](#) | Published April 29, 2020

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An Eager Student, He Aimed to Become a Physician Assistant



(Catrisha House-Phelps)

James House

Age: 40

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Omni Continuing Care nursing home in Detroit

Date of Death: March 31, 2020

James House had a voracious appetite for learning about and a fascination with the human body.

His sister, Catrisha House-Phelps, traces it back to childhood visits to a dialysis center where their father received treatments. “That was what tugged at his heart,” she said. “He just always wanted to know ‘why.’”

House-Phelps said her brother adored his five children, treasured his anatomy and physiology books and got a kick out of the residents he cared for at Omni Continuing Care. “He thought they were family; he just said they were funny people,” she said. He had hoped to go back to school to become a physician assistant.

House came down with what he thought was the flu in mid-March. His sister said he tried to get tested for COVID-19 but was turned away because he was not showing textbook symptoms and had no underlying health issues. On March 31, after resting at home for over a week, House returned to work. Hours later, he collapsed and was rushed to the

hospital.

He texted his sister with updates on his condition. “I’m about to be intubated now,” he wrote. It was the last message he sent her.

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | Published April 29, 2020

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She Loved a Parade and Catering to Patients



Pamela Hughes and her daughter, Brie
(Angie McAllister)

Pamela Hughes

Age: 50

Occupation: Nursing home medication aide

Place of Work: Signature HealthCARE at Summit Manor in Columbia, Kentucky

Date of Death: April 13, 2020

Pamela Hughes lived her entire life in rural Columbia, Kentucky, but longed for wide, sandy beaches. For vacation, Hughes and her daughter, Brie, 26, eagerly drove 14 hours to Daytona Beach, Florida, or Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

After high school, Hughes worked at Summit Manor, a nursing home in Columbia, for 32 years. She knew which residents preferred chocolate milk or applesauce with their medication; she remembered their favorite outfits and colors. Hughes’ shy demeanor vanished each December when she and co-worker Angie McAllister built a float for the town’s Christmas parade competition.

“We built 10 floats over 10 years,” McAllister said. “We got second place every year.”

Even after several residents tested positive for the coronavirus, Hughes dismissed her worsening cough as allergies or bronchitis. The nursing home was short on help and she wanted to serve her patients, Brie said.

Days later, the public health department suggested her mother get tested. She tested positive, and her health worsened — food tasted bitter, her fever soared, her hearing dulled. On April 10, Hughes was taken by ambulance to a hospital, then by helicopter to Jewish Hospital in Louisville. Barred from visiting, Brie said goodbye over FaceTime.

— [Sarah Varney, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published April 29, 2020

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The Family Matriarch and ‘We’re Failing Miserably Without Her’



(Ginu John)

Aleyamma John

Age: 65

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Queens Hospital Center in New York City

Date of Death: April 5, 2020

Aleyamma John’s family wanted her to retire. Her husband, Johnny, an MTA transit worker, had stopped working a few years earlier. He and their son Ginu urged her to follow suit. “We told her, ‘I’m sure Dad wants to see the world with you — you need to give him that opportunity,’” Ginu said.

She demurred. “I think she found fulfillment in being able to serve,” Ginu said. “She was able to hold people’s hands, you know, even when they were deteriorating and be there for them.” She began her career as a nurse in India 45 years

ago; she and her husband immigrated to the United Arab Emirates, where their two sons were born, and moved to New York in 2002.

Ginu said his mother, a devout Christian, found joy in tending to her vegetable garden and doting on her two grandchildren. She cooked dishes from her native India and filled the Long Island home she shared with Johnny, Ginu and Ginu's family with flowers.

In March, as Queens Hospital Center began to swell with COVID-19 patients, John sent her family a photo of herself and colleagues wearing surgical hats and masks but not enough personal protective equipment. Days later, she developed a fever and tested positive for the virus. Johnny, Ginu and Ginu's wife, Elsa, a nurse practitioner, also became ill.

When John's breathing became labored, her family made the difficult decision to call 911. It would be the last time they saw her. "We're 17 days in, and I feel like we're failing miserably without her," Ginu said.

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | Published April 29, 2020

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'A Kind Man' Looking Forward to Retirement



(Jesse Soto)

Thomas Soto

Age: 59

Occupation: Radiology clerk

Place of Work: Woodhull Medical Center, a public hospital in Brooklyn, New York

Date of Death: April 7, 2020

After more than 30 years at one of New York City's busy public hospitals, Thomas Soto loved his job but was looking forward to retiring, said his son, Jesse Soto, who lived with him.

At Soto's busy station near the emergency room, he greeted patients and took down their information.

"Everybody saw him before their X-rays," Soto, 29, said. "He smiled all day, made jokes. He was a kind man."

As COVID patients began to overwhelm Woodhull and other emergency rooms across the city, Soto said that at first his father didn't have any protective gear.

He eventually got a mask. But he still grew very sick, developing a high fever, body aches and a wracking cough. After a week, Soto said, "he couldn't take it anymore."

He went to Woodhull, where he was admitted. When they tried to put him on a ventilator two days later, he died. The hospital did not respond to requests for comment.

— [Michelle Andrews](#) | Published April 29, 2020

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'Blooming' in Her First Job on Path to Becoming a Nurse



(The Viveros family via GoFundMe)

Valeria Viveros

Age: 20

Occupation: Nursing assistant

Place of Work: Extended Care Hospital of Riverside, California

Date of Death: April 10, 2020

At 20 years old, Valeria Viveros was “barely blooming,” developing the skills and ambition to pursue a nursing career, said Gustavo Urrea, her uncle. Working at Extended Care Hospital of Riverside was her first job.

Viveros, born in California to Mexican immigrants, grew attached to her patients at the nursing home, bringing them homemade ceviche, Urrea said. About a month ago, as he watched her cook, play and joke with her grandmother, he noticed how much her social skills had grown.

When she would say “Hi, Tío,” in her playful, sweet, high-pitched voice, “it was like the best therapy you could have,” Urrea recalled. Viveros, who lived with her parents and two siblings, was enrolled in classes at a community college.

Viveros felt sick on March 30, went to a nearby hospital and was sent home with Tylenol, Urrea said. By April 4, she couldn’t get out of bed on her own. She left in an ambulance and never came back.

“We’re all destroyed,” he said. “I can’t even believe it.”

On April 5, county health officials [reported a coronavirus outbreak](#) had sickened 30 patients and some staff at her nursing home. Trent Evans, general counsel for Extended Care, said staffers are heartbroken by her death.

Viveros was “head over heels in love with the residents that she served,” he said. “She was always there for them.”

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | *Published April 29, 2020*

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Surgical Technician Made Friends Everywhere She Went

Monica Echeverri Casarez (Jorge Casarez)

Monica Echeverri Casarez

Age: 49

Occupation: Surgical technician

Place of Work: Detroit Medical Center Harper University Hospital in Detroit

Date of Death: April 11, 2020

Monica Echeverri Casarez was in constant motion, said her husband, Jorge Casarez. The daughter of Colombian immigrants, she worked as a Spanish-English interpreter in clinical settings. She was the kind of person whose arrival at a mom and pop restaurant would elicit hugs from the owners. She also co-founded Southwest Detroit Restaurant Week, a nonprofit that supports local businesses.

Twice a month, she scrubbed in as a surgical technician at Harper University Hospital. “She liked discovering the beauty of how the body works and how science is clear and orderly,” Casarez said. She was organized and intuitive, qualities that are assets in the operating room. On March 21, she [posted a photo](#) of herself in protective gear with the caption: “I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t at least a bit nervous to be there now.” Since many elective surgeries had been canceled, Echeverri Casarez was tasked with taking the temperatures of people who walked into the hospital and making sure their hands were sterilized.

Soon after, Echeverri Casarez and Casarez began feeling ill. Quarantined together, Echeverri Casarez tried to make the best of the situation. She baked her husband a cake — chocolate with white frosting. She died a few days later.

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | *Published April 24, 2020*

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A Whip-Smart Neurologist Endlessly Fascinated With the Brain

Gary Sclar (Jennifer Sclar)

Gary Sclar

Age: 66

Occupation: Neurologist

Place of Work: Mount Sinai Queens in New York City

Date of Death: April 12, 2020

Gary Sclar was a whip-smart neurologist who loved comic books, “Game of Thrones” and “Star Wars,” said his daughter, Jennifer Sclar. He was deeply compassionate with a blunt bedside manner.

“My dad was fascinated with the brain and with science,” Jennifer Sclar said. “His work was his passion, and it’s what made him the happiest, besides my brother and me.” Set to retire in June, he was looking forward to writing about politics and neurology.

Gary Sclar saw patients who were showing COVID-19 symptoms and knew his age and underlying health conditions — he had diabetes — put him at risk for developing complications from the illness. His daughter pleaded with him to stop going to the hospital.

In early April, he mentioned having lost his sense of smell, and on April 8 he collapsed in his home. He was hospitalized a few days later and agreed to be intubated. “I don’t think he realized, like, that this was the end,” Jennifer Sclar said. “He brought his keys. He brought his wallet.”

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | Published April 24, 2020

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An Exacting but Loving Aunt, She Was a Mentor Until the End

Araceli Buendia Ilagan (Jhoanna Mariel Buendia)

Araceli Buendia Ilagan

Age: 63

Occupation: Intensive care unit nurse

Place of Work: Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami

Date of Death: March 27, 2020

For Jhoanna Mariel Buendia, her aunt was a constant — if distant — presence. Araceli Buendia Ilagan emigrated from their hometown Baguio, in the Philippines, to the U.S. before Buendia was born, but she remained close to her family and communicated with them nearly every day.

“She was one of the smartest people I ever knew,” Buendia, 27, said. Buendia Ilagan, who at one point looked into adopting her niece so she could join her and her husband the United States, encouraged Buendia to become a nurse, and talked her through grueling coursework in anatomy and physiology. Buendia is now a nurse in London.

Buendia Ilagan was also demanding. “Whenever she visited the Philippines, she wanted everything to be organized and squeaky-clean,” Buendia said.

The last time the two spoke, in late March, Buendia Ilagan didn’t mention anything about feeling ill. Instead, the two commiserated over their experiences of treating patients with COVID-19; as always, her aunt offered her advice on staying safe while giving the best possible care. She died four days later.

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | Published April 22, 2020

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A Beloved Geriatric Psychiatrist and Church Musician Remembered for His Cooking Skills



(Nida Gonzales)

Leo Dela Cruz

Age: 57

Occupation: Geriatric psychiatrist

Place of Work: Christ Hospital and CarePoint Health in Jersey City, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 8, 2020

Dr. Leo Dela Cruz was nervous about going to work in the weeks before he died, his friends said. Like many in the region, Christ Hospital had an influx of COVID-19 patients and [faced a shortage](#) of ventilators and masks.

Dela Cruz was a geriatric psychiatrist and didn't work in coronavirus wards. But he continued to see patients in person. In early April, Dela Cruz, who lived alone, complained only of migraines, his friends said. Within a week, his condition worsened, and he was put on a ventilator at a nearby hospital. He died soon after.

Friends said he may have been exposed at the hospital. (In a statement, hospital representatives said he didn't treat COVID-19 patients.)

Dela Cruz, the oldest of 10 siblings, came from a family of health care professionals. His friends and family — from Cebu, Philippines, to Teaneck, New Jersey — remembered his jovial personality on Facebook. He won “best doctor of the year” awards, played tennis and cooked traditional Cebu dishes.

Nida Gonzales, a colleague, said he always supported people, whether funding a student's education or running a church mental health program. “I feel like I lost a brother,” she said.

— [Ankita Rao, The Guardian](#) | Published April 22, 2020

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Alabama Nurse Remembered as Selfless but Sassy

Rose Harrison (Amanda Williams)

Rose Harrison

Age: 60

Occupation: Nurse

Place of Work: Marion Regional Nursing Home in Hamilton, Alabama

Date of Death: April 6, 2020

Rose Harrison, 60, lived to serve others — her husband, three daughters, grandchildren and the residents of the nursing home where she worked. Though the Alabama nurse was selfless, she also had a sassy edge to her personality and a penchant for road rage, her daughter, Amanda Williams said.

“Her personality was so funny, you automatically loved her,” Williams said. “She was so outspoken. If she didn't agree with you, she'd tell you in a respectful way.”

Harrison was not wearing a mask when she cared for a patient who later tested positive for COVID-19 at Marion Regional Nursing Home in Hamilton, Alabama, her daughter said. She later developed a cough, fatigue and a low-grade fever, but kept reporting to duty all week. Officials from the nursing home did not return calls for comment.

On April 3, Williams drove her mother to a hospital. The following evening, Harrison discussed the option of going on a ventilator with loved ones on a video call, agreeing it was the best course. Williams believed that her mother fully expected to recover. She died April 6.

— [Christina Jewett, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published April 22, 2020

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Connecticut Social Worker Had Angelic Singing Voice and a Zest for Life



(The Hunt family)

Curtis Hunt

Age: 57

Occupation: Social worker

Places of Work: Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center and New Reach, both in New Haven, Connecticut

Date of Death: March 23, 2020

At a shelter for adults recovering from addiction, residents looked forward to the days when Marion “Curtis” Hunt would take the stage, emceed talent shows and belting out Broadway and gospel tunes.

It wasn’t part of his job description as a social worker. It was just one of the ways he went “above and beyond,” said his supervisor at Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center, Daena Murphy. “He had a beautiful voice,” she said. “He was just a wonderful person — funny, engaging, always a huge smile on his face.”

Hunt, the youngest of four brothers, earned his master’s in social work from Fordham University at 52, and was baptized at his brother’s Pentecostal church at 54. He was a devoted uncle who doted on his dog and cat, Mya and Milo.

It’s unclear how Hunt got infected, but one patient he worked with had tested positive for COVID-19, as did two co-workers, according to Dr. Ece Tek, another supervisor at Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center. Hunt died on March 23, one week after developing flu-like symptoms, said his brother John Mann Jr.

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | *Published April 22, 2020*

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To the End, King-Smith Was Driven by a Desire to Help Others

Kim King-Smith (Hassana Salaam-Rivers)

Kim King-Smith

Age: 53

Occupation: Electrocardiogram technician

Place of Work: University Hospital in Newark, New Jersey

Date of Death: March 31, 2020

Kim King-Smith was a natural caregiver. An only child, she grew up close to her extended family, including her cousins Hassana Salaam-Rivers and Sharonda Salaam. After Salaam developed multiple sclerosis, King-Smith visited her every day.

“She’d bring her sweets that she wasn’t supposed to have and share them with her,” Salaam-Rivers said. King-Smith’s desire to care for others was the reason she became an electrocardiogram technician, her cousin added. “If a friend or family member went to the hospital, she would always go and visit them as soon as her shift was over,” she said.

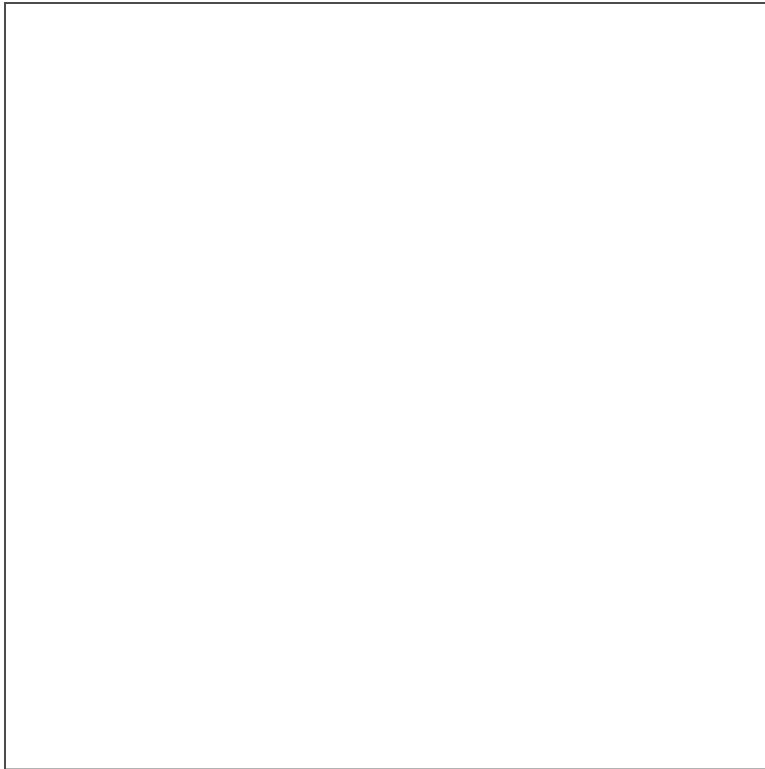
In March, King-Smith cared for a patient she said had symptoms of COVID-19; she soon fell ill herself and tested positive for the virus. It seemed like a mild case at first, and she stayed in touch with family via FaceTime while trying to isolate from her husband, Lenny.

On March 29, Salaam-Rivers checked in on her cousin and noticed she was struggling to breathe. She urged her to call an ambulance. After King-Smith was hospitalized, she exchanged text messages with her mother and cousin. As the day progressed, her messages carried increasingly grave news, Salaam-Rivers said. Then she stopped responding.

— [Danielle Renwick, *The Guardian*](#) | *Published April 22, 2020*

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On the Eve of Retirement, VA Nurse Succumbs to COVID-19



(Mark Accad)

Debbie Accad

Age: 72

Occupation: Clinical nursing coordinator

Place of Work: Detroit VA Medical Center in Detroit, Michigan

Date of Death: March 30, 2020

Nurse Divina “Debbie” Accad had cared for veterans for over 25 years and was set to retire in April. But after contracting the novel coronavirus, she spent her final 11 days on a ventilator — and didn’t survive past March.

She joined a growing list of health care professionals working on the front lines of the pandemic who have died from COVID-19.

Accad, 72, a clinical nursing coordinator at the Detroit VA Medical Center, dedicated her life to nursing, according to her son Mark Accad.

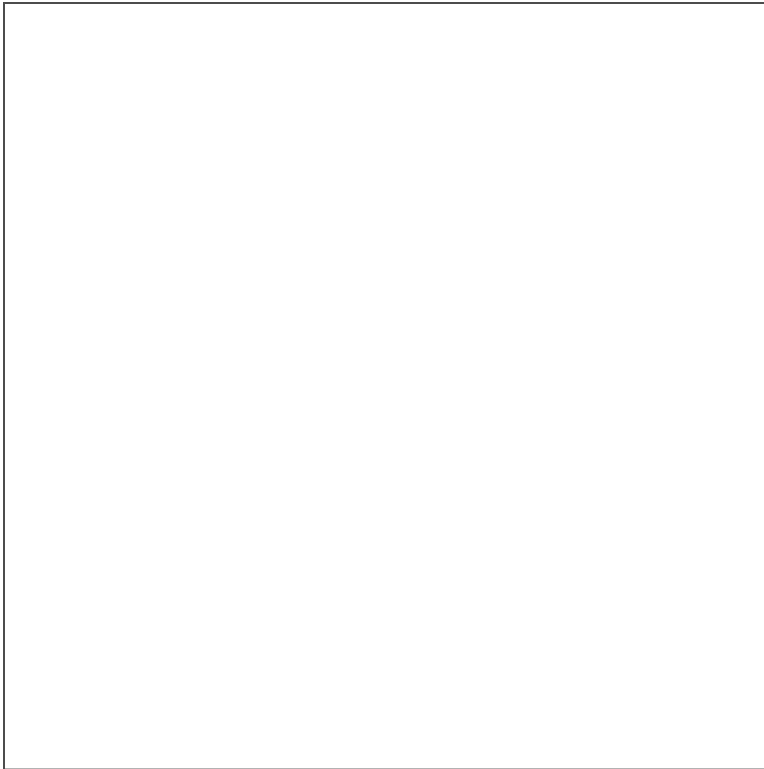
“She died doing what she loved most,” he said. “That was caring for people.”

[Read more here.](#)

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | *Published April 15, 2020*

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California Nurse Thrived in ER and ICU but Couldn’t Survive COVID-19



Jeff Baumbach and his wife, Karen

(The Baumbach family)

Jeff Baumbach

Age: 57

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: St. Joseph's Medical Center in Stockton, California

Date of Death: March 31, 2020

Jeff Baumbach, 57, was a seasoned nurse of 28 years when the novel coronavirus began to circulate in California. He'd worked in the ER, the ICU and on a cardiac floor. Hepatitis and tuberculosis had been around over the years but never posed a major concern. He'd cared for patients who had tuberculosis.

Jeff and his wife, Karen Baumbach, also a nurse, initially didn't consider it significantly riskier than challenges they'd faced for years.

"He'd worked in the ICU. He was exposed to so many things, and we never got anything," she said. "This was just ramping up."

One day during work, Jeff sent a sarcastic text to his wife: "I love wearing a mask every day."

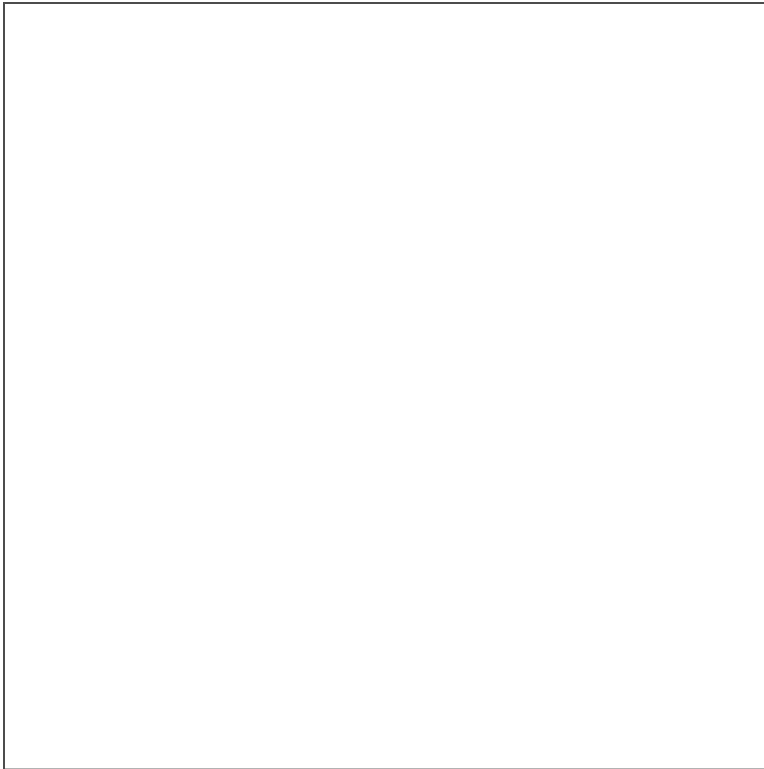
Within weeks, he would wage a difficult and steady fight against the virus that ended with a sudden collapse.

[Read more here.](#)

— [Christina Jewett, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published April 15, 2020

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Nurse's Faith Led Her to Care for Prisoners at a New Jersey Jail



(Denise Rendor)

Daisy Doronila

Age: 60

Occupation: Registered nurse

Place of Work: Hudson County Correctional Facility in Kearny, New Jersey

Date of Death: April 5, 2020

Daisy Doronila had a different perspective than most who worked at the Hudson County Correctional Facility, a New Jersey lockup 11 miles from Manhattan. It was a place where the veteran nurse could put her Catholic faith into action, showing kindness to marginalized people.

“There would be people there for the most heinous crimes,” said her daughter, Denise Rendor, 28, “but they would just melt towards my mother because she really was there to give them care with no judgment.”

Doronila, 60, died April 5, two weeks after testing positive for the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. The jail has been hit hard by the virus, with 27 inmates and 68 staff members having tested positive. Among those, another nurse, a correctional officer and a clerk also died, according to Ron Edwards, Hudson County’s director of corrections.

Doronila fell ill before the scope of the jail infections were known. She was picking up extra shifts in the weeks before, her daughter said, and planning on a trip to Israel soon with friends from church.

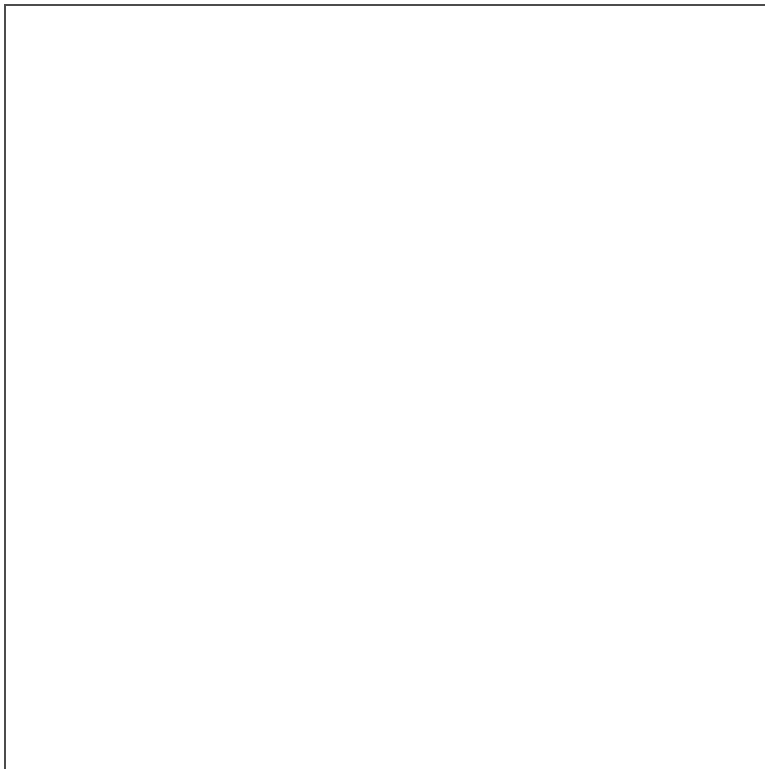
That plan began to fall apart March 14, when someone at the jail noticed her coughing and asked her to go home and visit a doctor.

[Read more here.](#)

— [Christina Jewett, Kaiser Health News](#) | Published April 15, 2020

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An Army Veteran, Hospital Custodian ‘Loved Helping People’



(Michelle Wilcox)

Alvin Simmons

Age: 54

Occupation: Environmental service assistant

Place of Work: Rochester General Hospital in Rochester, New York

Death: March 17, 2020

Alvin Simmons started working as a custodian at Rochester General Hospital, in New York state, weeks before he fell ill. “He loved helping people and he figured the best place to do that would be in a hospital,” his sister, Michelle Wilcox said.

An Army veteran who had served in the first Gulf War, Simmons loved karaoke and doted on his three grandchildren, Wilcox said. “He was a dedicated, hardworking individual who had just changed his life around” since a prison stint, she said.

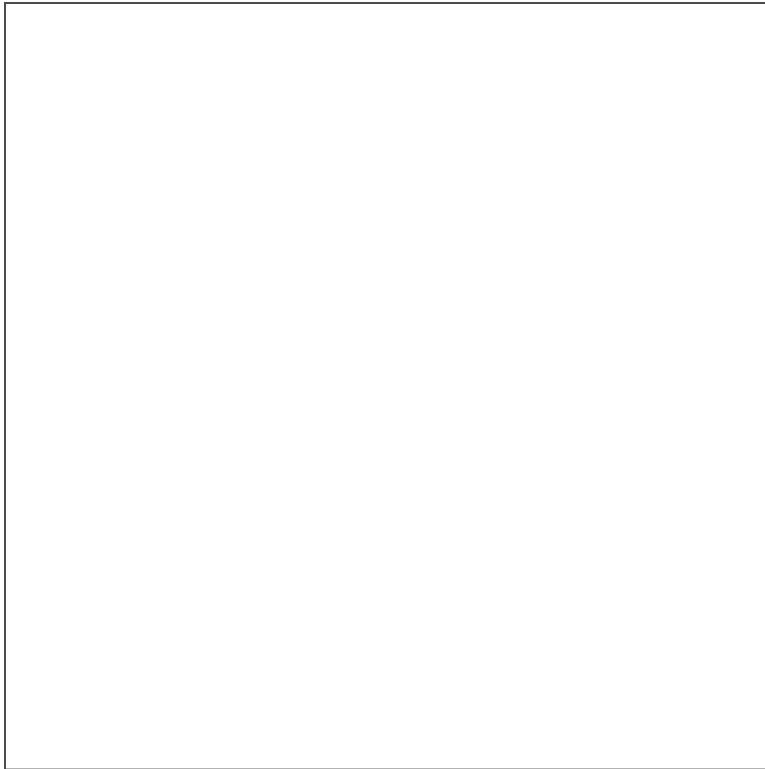
According to Wilcox, Simmons began developing symptoms shortly after cleaning the room of a woman he believed was infected with the novel coronavirus. “Other hospital employees did not want to clean the room because they said they weren’t properly trained” to clean the room of someone potentially infected, she said. “They got my brother from a different floor, because he had just started there,” she said. (In an email, a hospital spokesperson said they had “no evidence to suggest that Mr. Simmons was at a heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19 by virtue of his training or employment duties at RGH.”)

On March 11, he visited the emergency room at Rochester General, where he was tested for COVID-19, Wilcox said. Over the next few days, as he rested at his girlfriend’s home, his breathing became more labored and he began to cough up blood. He was rushed to the hospital on March 13, where he was later declared brain-dead. Subsequently, he received a COVID-19 diagnosis. Simmons died on March 17.

— [Danielle Renwick, The Guardian](#) | Published April 15, 2020

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Nurse at Nevada VA Dies After Caring for Infected Colleague



(Bob Thompson)

Vianna Thompson

Age: 52

Occupation: Nurse

Places of Work: VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System and Northern Nevada Medical Center in Reno, Nevada

Date of Death: April 7, 2020

Nurse Vianna Thompson, 52, spent two night shifts caring for a fellow Veterans Affairs health care worker who was dying from COVID-19.

Two weeks later, she too was lying in a hospital intensive care unit, with a co-worker holding her hand as she died.

Thompson and the man she treated were among [three VA health care workers](#) in Reno, Nevada, to die in two weeks from complications of the novel coronavirus.

“It’s pretty devastating. It’s surreal. Reno’s not that big of a city,” said Robyn Underhill, a night nurse who worked with Thompson in the ER at Reno’s VA hospital the past two years.

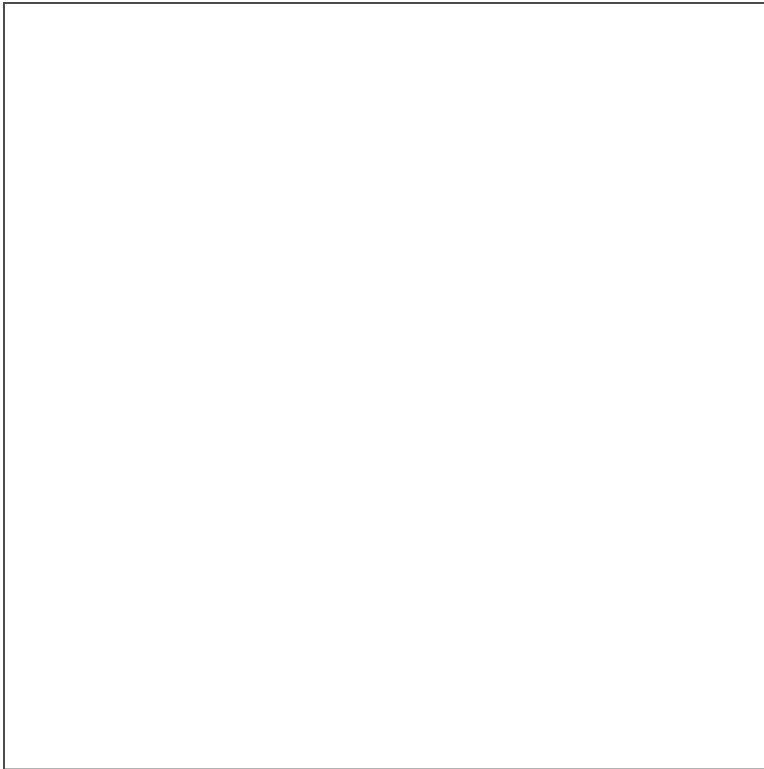
Thompson, who dreamed of teaching nursing one day, died April 7, joining a growing list of health care professionals killed in the pandemic.

[Read more here.](#)

— [Melissa Bailey](#) | *Published April 15, 2020*

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Dr. J. Ronald Verrier Was Busy Saving Lives Before the Pandemic



(Christina Pardo)

J. Ronald Verrier

Age: 59

Occupation: Surgeon

Place of Work: St. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx, New York

Date of Death: April 8, 2020

Dr. J. Ronald Verrier, a surgeon at St. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx, spent the final weeks of his audacious, unfinished life tending to a torrent of patients inflicted with COVID-19. He died April 8 at Mount Sinai South Nassau Hospital in Oceanside, New York, at age 59, after falling ill from the novel coronavirus.

Verrier led the charge even as the financially strapped St. Barnabas Hospital struggled to find masks and gowns to protect its workers — many nurses continue to make cloth masks — and makeshift morgues in the parking lot held patients who had died.

“He did a good work,” said Jeannine Sherwood, a nurse manager at St. Barnabas Hospital who worked closely with Verrier.

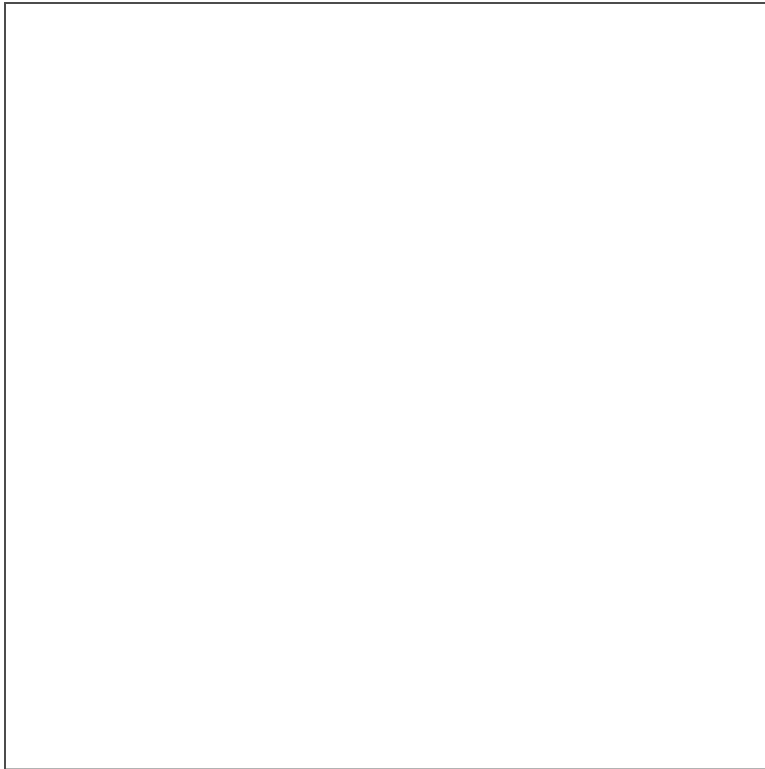
“He can rest.”

[Read more here.](#)

— [Sarah Varney, Kaiser Health News](#) | *Published April 15, 2020*

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America’s First ER Doctor to Die in the Heat of COVID-19 Battle



(Debra Vasalech Lyons)

Frank Gabrin

Age: 60

Occupation: Doctor

Places of Work: St. John's Episcopal in Queens, New York, and East Orange General in New Jersey

Date of Death: March 26, 2020

At about 5 a.m. on March 19, a New York City ER physician named Frank Gabrin texted a friend about his concerns over the lack of medical supplies at hospitals.

"It's busy — everyone wants a COVID test that I do not have to give them," he wrote in the message to Eddy Soffer. "So they are angry and disappointed."

Worse, though, was the limited availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) — the masks and gloves that help keep health care workers from getting sick and spreading the virus to others. Gabrin said he had no choice but to don the same mask for several shifts, against Food and Drug Administration guidelines.

"Don't have any PPE that has not been used," he wrote. "No N95 masks — my own goggles — my own face shield," he added, referring to the N95 respirators considered among the best lines of defense.

Less than two weeks later, Gabrin became the first ER doctor in the U.S. known to have died as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the American College of Emergency Physicians.

[Read more here.](#)

— [Alastair Gee, The Guardian](#) | Published April 10, 2020

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This story is part of “[Lost on the Frontline](#),” an ongoing project from [The Guardian](#) and Kaiser Health News that aims to document the lives of health care workers in the U.S. who die from COVID-19, and to investigate why so many are victims of the disease. If you have a colleague or loved one we should include, please [share their story](#).

Note: As of Aug. 10, 2020, all updates to *Lost on the Frontline* are available at khn.org/lost-on-the-frontline.

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