

A day in the life of a plague victim

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One day, I was informed that I had positive test results for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)!

How did I contract the virus? I have no idea. I did, however, follow public health guidelines to the letter: I maintained physical distance, always wore a mask, and washed my hands until my eczema flared up. Neither did I do anything reprehensible: no traveling or karaoke (especially with a voice like mine!), and I never left my bubble.

Once I had been notified, I went into self-isolation. I followed the guidelines to the letter. I stayed home without seeing anyone ... neither in close proximity nor from afar. This is fairly difficult to do when you live alone, as do 4 million Canadians.¹ What do you do with yourself every day? How do you take care of your basic needs? You end up figuring it out. It could be worse: think of the elderly living in institutions, long-term care, or retirement homes, who are confined to their rooms, who were cut off from family caregivers during the first wave, and who receive their meals while isolated from others. Housed and fed, as they say!

After a few days, I got a fever followed by aches and pains all over, and I was coughing like a chain-smoker. So, I tried calling my doctor. His receptionist told me that he could not see me because of the health guidelines in place, risk of contagion, hot and cold zones. He advised me to visit a dedicated COVID-19 assessment clinic. But how to get there? I was so ill, so exhausted. Just getting from my bed to the kitchen or the bathroom felt like a major undertaking. I was certainly not going to ask a friend or family member for help given the risk of transmission.

And so, I waited. Waited for it to pass. Prayed for it to stop. But it would not pass! Out of desperation, when I could take no more, when I had begun to feel short of breath, I called an ambulance.

Once at the hospital, they put me in greater isolation. They placed me in a room alone, confined to a unit, cloistered. Everyone around me was coughing, everyone was ill. Severely ill. They put me on an IV. I was questioned and examined at a distance by gloved, masked personnel covered from head to toe—looking like extraterrestrials—who asked me from afar how I was feeling. What a question!

Then they transferred me to intensive care. And there, too, I was alone, alone with myself. Receiving various treatments, each of uncertain effectiveness. Forget about antiretrovirals and antibiotics. Forget anti-inflammatories, hydroxychloroquine, cortisone.^{2,3}

Forget anticoagulation. I was given comfort care and they spoke to me about levels of medical intervention, oxygen therapy, intubation. I was really in a bad state.

Know that when you die, you will be forgotten. Your death might appear in the obituary section of a local or national newspaper without anyone really knowing how you died. Everyone will read the dates: 1951 to 2021. Some will do a quick calculation ... 70 years old, that's not so bad. It would be nice if they wrote "Died from COVID-19," but nothing will be done about it. Above all, we should not be talking about these things. State secrets. Then once it is all over, you might be cremated. Alas, very few people will come to your funeral. Mandatory isolation.

The deadliest pandemic recorded was the Black Death, caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. The pandemic killed up to 75 to 200 million people in Europe, Asia, and North Africa, with deaths peaking in Europe between 1347 and 1351.^{4,5}

In 2020 and 2021, an estimated 99.5 million people contracted the virus worldwide and more than 2 million have died.⁶ In Canada alone, 747 000 people have been infected and 19 000 have died.⁷ In less than a year.

We thought ourselves a modern society. That with our knowledge and technological advancements we could prevail over all threats. Now we believe that vaccines and the potential discovery of antiviral therapies will transform all of this into nothing but a bad dream.

That could well be ...

These words are a tribute to everyone who has been infected by this virus. Barring a few details, they have all been through this. They have each lived a "day" in the life of a plague victim. We owe them remembrance. 🌿

References

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