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Jocelyn Osorio-Alvarado

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Thank You, Mami

By Jocelyn Osorio-Alvarado

It's day 43 of quarantine in Humboldt County, and all I can think about is trust. Trust that this will be over soon, trust in all that are affected will recover, and trust that life will soon go back to "normal." When shelter in place began for the first few weeks I thought, "Wow spring break came early! Now I'll have a few weeks of relaxation." I honestly regret saying that. This new "lifestyle" has made me question my sanity. I have tried to keep calm and pray this will have a positive end result, but it's difficult to be optimistic when I have a close family member as a frontline worker. Monica Alvarado-Osorio, RNC-OB, my amazing mother. This past month and a half has been difficult for my family. Our anxiety has been higher than ever, especially knowing my mom is around this virus when she sets foot in her workspace. Each day brings a new challenge and we've done nothing but pull through together. I remember asking my mom one day after work, "Do you think this will be over soon?" I looked at her sweaty, red face covered in marks from the N95 mask as she responded with, "I don't know... We have a long road ahead of us."

My mom is an OB nurse at Redwood Memorial Hospital, and has been for about 10 years now. She is 34 years old, an

excellent daughter, wife, mother, and healthcare professional. She's dealt with numerous medical issues and emergencies, but never something like COVID-19. I sat down with my hardworking mother one evening and discussed her new "normal" at work. She began by telling me her internal and external struggles. "Internally, it's hard to adjust to all new changes. New protocols and procedures have been developed, and previous ones have been adjusted. It's difficult to change things that you've been doing for the last few years. An example would be remembering each step when performing a task. It was also hard to adjust the changes in equipment and PPE (personal protective equipment) as well as take more precautions and save as much PPE as possible so we can save our resources. I've had to learn to don (put on) clean PPE and doff (take off) and dispose of dirty/contaminated PPE properly. There's different PPE depending on whether the patient is a PUI (person under investigation) or COVID positive. Externally speaking, our department has made tremendous changes. We are now a closed unit. We have to screen everyone that comes in by asking about their health status and other questions before they are allowed to enter our unit. Only one support person can be present for a birth, and if you're not in labor, or just an outpatient, you can't have anyone in the room with you. We have to assess symptoms daily on in-patients and support persons. We have a room set aside for isolation purposes, specifically for anyone in labor and is a PUI or positive for COVID-19. It's equipped with isolation equipment and isolation carts outside with the

proper PPE for caregivers. We limit the amount of staff on our unit, a lot of elective procedures have been canceled. We are all required to wear N95 masks, face shields, gowns, shoe covers, and hair masks for every delivery (vaginal and c-section) because studies have shown that many pregnant women are asymptomatic, which can lead to a positive diagnosis of coronavirus, thus symptoms can become present after delivery. We have to wear masks outside of the delivery as well at all times. There is only one entrance into the hospital, and we are required to get screened for coronavirus before our shift. The masks become extremely hot after a few hours of use, and your face gets itchy and sweaty. It's hard to breathe under these masks and are hardly able to see anything. Many community members are complaining about wearing masks for a grocery run for a few hours and will never understand how easy they have it."

After discussing her feelings, my mom began to talk about what the future will look like from now on. "These next few weeks we will be swabbing all patients for COVID-19. We will have strict protocols on what to do with a baby if mom has been infected or exposed. They can choose to keep the baby with them, or if the baby will be separated from them." I then asked her what fears she has/or has had during this pandemic. "I have an enormous amount of fears, not only for our community, but for my family. My main fear at work would be the spread of the virus, and having a Humboldt outbreak just like New York, Italy, or even China. I fear that we won't have enough beds for our patients, that if we start to get seriously ill

patients, we will eventually start losing people to this virus in our county. I fear that we will run out of PPE and start re-wearing contaminated ones or wearing the same PPE all day, in order to save some for the next shift. If I get infected, that would be my overall biggest fear. What if I bring it home to my family? What if I vector COVID-19 and I leave my family without a mother, daughter, sister, or wife?" Her telling me that hurt my heart.

Before ending the interview, I wanted to end on a positive note. I asked my mom what her hopes were for the next few months. "My hopes for the coming months is that we continue to social distance to help decrease the spread, that we master our new protocols or come up with new ones to improve our practice at the hospital, that we develop a vaccine to protect not only the community, but the nation as well. My job is extra hard right now as a charge nurse because I have to make sure all policies and procedures are being followed and that things run smoothly. I make a lot of decisions and deal with a lot of unhappy and stressful patients. I want our patients to know that even though things are very scary and uncertain, we are still there to support them during one of their biggest moments in life, the birth of a new baby." My mom ended our conversation by thanking the community. "I want to thank them for honoring the SIP and social distancing. It helps us keep our numbers down so that we don't reach the level of the surge. I hope we establish a good plan for the next wave of COVID and that we have more PPE ready for when that happens."

Coming from the daughter of a nurse, I want to thank all frontline workers across the globe. Without your time and dedication, this pandemic would be wildfire. Although you're all going through this difficult time with stress and tears, know that you're all incredibly strong and will pull through together to stop COVID-19. Your work certainly does not go unnoticed and your communities are here to root you on till the end of this pandemic, and beyond. Never have I been more thankful to have a close family member as a healthcare provider. Even though she's not directly working in the ER, she's just as important and just as prone to exposure. On behalf of myself, our family, and community, Thank you, Mami.