

Letter to Editor

Hanan and COVID-19

Mahir Yousif*

***Corresponding Author:** Mahir Yousif, General Surgery Specialist/Chief of resident doctors, Dr Sulaiman AL Habib Hospital, Dubai-UAE.

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Preface

Hanan, in this picture she is sleeping on my chest shortly after she was born about 2 months ago in the middle of our Corona crisis. She is my first born and she's absolutely the most precious jewel I've ever held or will ever hold in my arms. She had the misfortune of being born in the middle of these troubled times.



I rarely write on LinkedIn but very recently, I've had an abundance of time to reflect on things. I work as a General Surgeon and Chief of Residents in a private hospital in Dubai. My hospital is usually busy and with the Crisis, it got much busier. Although I'm not a first liner, the last few months were quite difficult and stressful; our surgical caseload reduced in number, but our cases got to be more complex seeing that we were only doing emergencies and critical life-saving surgeries. Add to that the administrative duties of managing my doctors, supportive staff, answering to higher management, and coordinating an unprecedented situation with tension running high among the medical and supportive staff of different levels.

Since the beginning of the crisis, I was trying to predict how I will manage the day Hanan is born. The aim was to get my wife in the hospital and both of them out of the hospital as soon as possible and to minimize their exposure in the hospital as much as possible keeping in mind that COVID and non-COVID patients are on different floors. Everything went according to plan and I managed to shorten their hospital stay and take them home without any unnecessary exposure.

Although I'm not a first liner, I still go in and out of the hospital almost on a daily basis, and that in its own merit is a risk factor to contract the disease. We take every possible precaution, we wear our masks, gowns, and gloves. We keep our distance, We dispose of our clothes as soon as we get home and we head immediately to shower before seeing anybody in our homes but we still have a higher risk of contracting the disease than anyone else in the community. We knew that from day one and we came to terms with it. We took an oath and it's a fight we have to fight and it's a risk we have to take. I would like to believe it was my fight alone and that I can spare my family by planning the birth of my daughter to the very last detail. Little did I know, that I will be bringing the fight home just a few short weeks after.

10 days ago, after a busy week in theatre, I've just finished my Iftar and went to spend my daily quality time with Hanan. While holding her close to my chest, I felt unwell and hot. I asked my wife to take her and I measured my temperature. It was 38.4. That number scared me but I tried to convince myself that it's okay. It's a wrong reading. I don't have any symptoms and I will measure it again and it will be back to normal. I was bargaining with myself not for my sake but for the sake of the 2-month old I was just holding, my love, my most precious and fragile one. That being said and not to risk things further I slept in a separate room that night. And unfortunately, things started to get worse as I became short of breath with a dry cough. I

went to the ED the next day and I met with one of my colleagues, taking my precautions and keeping my distance. I told him what happened and he confirmed my worst fears that I might have contracted the disease and that I might have been exposing my family to it for a few days keeping the incubation period in mind. He did some tests and took a swab for the COVID19 PCR test, gave me some meds, and asked me to self-isolate until we have the results.

Over the course of the next few days, the self-bargaining continued. I was self-isolating but kept telling myself that it's just a common cold, I'm getting better, I'm only staying away from my wife and daughter to stop them from catching my common cold. It can't be Corona because I can't be the one who gave it to my daughter. Unfortunately, 3 days later my hopes got shattered when my result came back positive. My symptoms were already getting better but, at that moment, I felt I was having 1000 heart attacks at the same time because that fight I tried so desperately to keep away from home just arrived in my home using me as a vessel. And my sweetest fragile flower might have the disease because of me. How can that be while I'm supposed to protect her and keep her safe?!! I pulled myself together. I told my wife and she started crying fearing for me and for our daughter. I tried to reassure her although I was not sure of anything myself. I kept a brave tone to encourage her. I told her we'll pull through although I had no idea what's next. I started making a few phone calls to coordinate testing for them. Their swabs were taken the next morning. Thank God they were all negative but these few days felt like years with my heart stopping every time I hear Hanan or her mother sneezing while talking to them on the phone.

I'm now recovering well and awaiting to clear the virus from my body to be able to go back to work. I'm one of the lucky people who got away with mild to moderate symptoms and didn't require hospitalization but this could have gone so wrong so fast. I wanted to share my story with our medical community to show how our battle and daily routine might actually put our families at risk, how that risk is real and great and so how careful we need to be. I spent my Eid alone in my room although my family is a few meters away. I couldn't hold my daughter on her first Eid but we will overcome this crisis and we will have many Eid's to come Insha'Allah.

The picture is a reminder of what matters the most in life and a reminder of what we are fighting for. We will win and life, love, and family will go on....

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