

My Encounter with Covid!

After almost a month-long hospitalisation and high-grade fever with tiring rigours, IV antibiotics, blood and blood components; I was eagerly looking forward to going home as I was afebrile. But Covid had other plans for me. My husband had to be admitted to the Covid ICU on the morning of 30th April 2020 and the storm struck me unaware in the evening. Once again, I was shivering but this was different; I was breathless too and *confused*. My physician, anaesthetist, cardiologist and nurses were all busy around me.

I saw my son and daughter-in-law in PPE kits standing at the foot end of my bed with great concern written on their faces and that's when I realised –the situation was grossly wrong. It indeed was with O2 sat 92% and E.F. 25 %. It was a cytokine storm hitting with all its might.

Being in the hospital for a long time, I was very ill-informed about this new disease called Covid. But it certainly appeared to be a strong enemy and I had to raise my guards. My systems did take up the challenge and I was better by the next morning. So, the next day when my son called to tell me that my Covid test was positive and an ambulance will take me to Covid ICU at Fortis, I accepted the decision without fear and in fact, without any emotion. It simply had to be done!

Now, it was not only a different ICU but a different fight too. I realised that at 68 years of age, I was at a great disadvantage with recent pyelonephritis, antibiotics, associated hypertension and diabetes though controlled, and the recent cytokine battle. But surprisingly I was calm, doing whatever I was told, and swallowing the given tablets. Never thinking about death. The good news was that my husband was stable and out of ICU. 2-3 days went off uneventfully in my opinion –with 4 am sponging, 5 am x-ray, 6 am blood collection, my left trapezius hurting badly, some patients

coughing, monitors beeping, someone else pulling a ventilator to a cubicle.

Now I was becoming breathless after speaking 2-3 sentences, so I stopped verbal communication on the phone. The monitor got pushed out of the range of my vision. My condition was deteriorating. High flow oxygen, the prone position was becoming difficult to tolerate though I was trying my best. *Was I losing my usual fighting spirit?* But now I was more concerned about my son who also was admitted to the same ICU.

My lungs had worsened. On the morning of 8th May, I was told that I needed to go on a ventilator! The first thought was *NO!* If I die while on a ventilator (which was a strong possibility), I will be completely ignorant about what's happening to me! (Actually, this thought makes no sense retrospectively). DEATH – the only certain event for a living being, was not new to me and neither was its suddenness. Riots, bomb blasts, accidents, building collapses had given me enough experience of sudden death. I was not scared of death. But I did not want to die when no one from my family could be with me to hold my hand when I take my last breath or when my heart beats for the last time.

So, I was determined that dying was out of the question. My husband and son came near the curtain of my cubicle and said, *"All your other systems are functioning well, accepting the ventilator will be good for you"*. This sounded logical, I agreed to the ventilator and firmly told both of them that I will certainly recover and be back home. Now it was my responsibility to remain alive though under the effect of sedation.

For the next 15 days, I was on a see-saw but I was unaware of it. I showed improvement and then I pulled out the endotracheal tube, the tube was back in, I developed VAP. (Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia). My family had full faith in my doctors. They were trying their best, but now were

hoping for a miracle. And it did happen! I responded to their mammoth efforts and finally, I could be weaned off the ventilator. On 29th May I came back home. Not able to sit, not able to stand, but ALIVE!

How did this happen despite all odds? I was not afraid of death but I had decided not to die. I am a strong person, particularly in difficult situations. But was my determination working while I was unaware of my surroundings? My family remained very positive throughout and believed in my fighting spirit. My miraculous recovery convinced my treating doctors that a combination of continued medical supports and the strong willpower of the patient can improve their chance of survival.

I don't believe in idol worship but I do have faith in the existence of a Supreme Power that has a significant role in deciding our destinies. I have always been convinced that I contribute a lot to the positive strength of my destiny as well when I do good for others, utilize my abilities to their fullest extent and share my experiences with others. After this incident, my faith in the control that destiny has on my life has only become stronger. But now I believe that besides me, all those who know me directly or indirectly can also influence my destiny with their positive thoughts, blessings, best wishes and prayers.

My greatest blessing was having the best team of doctors to treat me; a team that never gave up. Positive thoughts of my family members, their belief in my strength, their complete faith in the team of doctors contributed greatly. Later, my son told me about the large number of my students who came together to wish for my recovery. All my friends expressed very positive thoughts while communicating with my family and some being experts in this area gave valuable suggestions to the treating team. My patients and their relatives, some of whom I had never met, were all praying for me. Kind and loving people working with me for my skin bank project conducted

prayer meetings and they perceived that they could connect with the positivity in me.

My recovery tells me that I was *privileged, blessed*. But, I can't keep on depending on these blessings. I must continue doing good for everyone I come in contact with and maintain the positivity in me. Like all medical professionals, I have always wished for the best outcome for all my patients but now, I wish for the recovery of each affected individual, every day. Death will eventually come for me when it has to, but till then, I should do what I can do to the best of my ability.

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