



Moments

MOMENTS: A NURSE'S DIARY 2020 no.2

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As Autumn fades into winter, distant summer memories of Cortona continue to sustain senior nurse and frontline worker Alexia Kelly in Dublin, Ireland. In this, her second diary entry, she refers to elderly people who have had no human contact since February, the bewildering defiance of some, for Ireland's second lockdown and the worrying prospect of Christmas.



The season has changed and I walk to work along dark, lamp lit streets; just me and the occasional brazen fox, a solitary jogger and city-bound cars speeding through quiet roads, permitted to travel because they are deemed 'essential workers'.

I listen to podcasts, 80's play lists or classical choral works, humming along, appreciating the solitude and trying to think of things to be grateful for - an exercise suggested by my sister.

I'm grateful to be able to get up and go to work. I'm grateful that no one I know has been seriously ill with Covid-19. I'm grateful that I have my health and I'm grateful for my family and friends. I am very *ungrateful*, however, for the menace that is Covid-19 and how it continues to ignore our pleas to go away, right now, this instant. The language in my head isn't quite so polite.

The last of the beautiful autumn leaves have collected in drifts along the pavement, asking to be

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however in these leafy drifts piled high - crispy, crunchy, colourful - are discarded face masks. It's a sight I never imagined witnessing. I think about the discarders of these masks and mentally heap scorn on them until I recall a recent incident, where I accidentally dropped a mask, and someone called after me to pick it up.



As I walk, my thoughts turn to the battle which raged at the start of this second lockdown and which continues even now; simmering, bubbling up now and again. This is a three-way battle, no doubt happening in every country; between the fading will of a weary people, a Government afraid to take a hard stance and further damage a battle-scarred electorate, and the national health advisors and scientists who will never face such judgement at a ballot box.

Our National public health emergency team (NPHET) continue to advise Government to take the strictest possible course of action in containing the spread of Covid; initially, at the start of this second wave, the Government decided not to and instead pleaded with us to abide strictly to social distancing rules, mask wearing etc... Sadly, our numbers kept rising and while our hospitals were not at that point overwhelmed, it seemed to be merely a matter of time. We entered lock down part II 4 weeks ago.

I find it bewildering to see people surprised, taken aback and unprepared for a second wave of Covid-19. How could anyone have thought this *wasn't* going to happen? Surely, we have never before been so saturated by information on a topic? Surely, everyone has heard what I have? That this rotten disease will impact our lives - with any number of waves still to come - until we are released from its grip by vaccine or treatment breakthrough.

I work hard at stilling my frustration at the conversations circulating at work, in the supermarket, on radio stations. I am becoming curmudgeonly as 2020 slinks furtively towards the backdoor.

This time around, there seems to be an air of complacency in some, of defiance in others and of profound fear in many. There are anti-lockdown protests, anti-mask protests, marches highlighting the suffering of small businesses and the hospitality industry. This lockdown is so far, less successful and NEPHET is worried. Our numbers have fallen, but remain stubbornly higher

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The chat show hosts debate with callers as to whether or not we're allowed to have granny over for Christmas dinner, whether more than six people from two different households can visit or the feasibility of a Zoom office party. They discuss whether dropping our guard for just three days, would really be so bad. They ask whether Santa Claus will still come and if so whether he ought to quarantine for fourteen days on his arrival in Ireland.

Hours of broadcasting time, pages and pages of print media and general speculation continue in masked huddles; social distance observance sliding, our important opinions unable to be heard across a two metre gap. What did we talk about before all of this?

At work, in the hospital, the corridors are marked with the ubiquitous Covid-yellow arrows we pretended we couldn't see for a long time, yet here we are, unconsciously falling in to line. The masks we were so reluctant to wear at the beginning of all this are now a must-have accessory. No one in the hospital has a naked face. Patients check the staff and staff check patients; no mask, no admission.

Last week, I saw three very elderly patients, one after the other. Their individual conditions are well controlled and they need not have attended, but each of them was worried that had they cancelled they might somehow have got lost in the system.

I felt that we had let these patients down. Each one had taken an unnecessary journey to an acute hospital during a pandemic and each told a similar story of cocooning or shielding themselves since March, barely seeing family or friends. One woman said she had not been touched by another human being since February. I touched her, with hand sanitizer applied and gloves. I thought about how sad that was, to be touched by a stranger instead of your own family and friends.

Now, when I check myself in the mirror, I notice new lines of weariness, fatigue and frustration etched ever deeper on my face. This is a year of aging, I think. Then I don my mask, sanitize my hands and another ground hog day begins, but I count my blessings as I see the sun inch above the horizon from my window, bathing Dublin bay in a warm orangey glow.



It leads me to thoughts of Italy and the memory of the sun warming my shoulders in the wonderful solitude of an early Cortona morning.....bliss, something else to be very grateful for and to look forward to when these difficult days are over.



Alexia Kelly, 04/12/2020 10:50:01

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