



# My perspective and history with COVID-19: A near death experience.

Edith Florez Félix<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universidad Iberoamericana Tijuana, Centro Universitario Ave. #2501 Playas de Tijuana, 22500 Tijuana, B.C. México.

Corresponding author: Edith Florez Félix, Universidad Iberoamericana Tijuana, Centro Universitario Ave. #2501 Playas de Tijuana, 22500 Tijuana, B.C. México. E-mail: tp1244@correo.tij.ibero.mx.

**Abstract.** - The year 2020 changed my life as well as those of many people in the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Personally, when I acquired the disease, I lived complex times that started with the initial signs and symptoms of this pathology and that nowadays affect my quality of life. It is especially important for me to share this chronicle of my life to share my story and the strategies that allowed me to move on.

**Keywords:** Perspective; COVID-19; Nursing; Intensive Care.

## 1. Introduction

Through the following chronicle, I wish to narrate my close experience with death due to having contracted COVID-19. These words may seem harsh, but they were (and are) part of my reality, and today I finally feel ready to tell this story. It is very important to me that other people know about my experience, including the emotions that accompanied me throughout the process, as well as the negative impact it had on me and my family. But more importantly, I want to share the strategies that allowed me to overcome it and be here today writing this memoir and testimony, because I know that there are people out there who, like me, suffered something similar and I want them to know that they are not alone, that there are always ways to move forward.

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Tijuana, the hospitals in the municipality were quickly overwhelmed, healthcare professionals were not enough, nor was the material and equipment. Knowing that people, including co-workers, were hospitalized and/or dying without the possibility of seeing their family again was something that terrified me.

The fear of contagion and the fear of being hospitalized could be felt. Despite the latent risk, like the vast majority of healthcare workers, I continued to perform my duties, which consisted of providing consultancy to elderly people - assuming, of course, the necessary precautions - since this group of the population demanded health care attention not related to COVID. However, the care I took was not enough, nor was the fact that I seemed to be healthy.

## 2. Development

### 2.1 The consultation

On Wednesday, December 21, 2020, I woke up and my body was not the same. I felt bad, with symptoms of a common cold, however, I never imagined that I already had COVID symptoms. The intensity of my discomfort led me to the difficult decision to go to a consultation. Upon arriving at the hospital, I could see a crowd waiting to be attended.

At that moment, I knew that the attention I was going to receive was probably not going to be the most appropriate. It was very hard and difficult to observe the helplessness of my colleagues. Due to the work overload, the lack of knowledge regarding how to treat the disease, and the shortage of personnel and supplies, they had to attend hastily and prescribe practically the same treatment based on what they had available.

At that moment, a myriad of emotions invaded me. I felt sadness, despair, frustration, fear, and helplessness all at once. Memories of when I was in that same hospital working, without imagining that I would return as a patient in the midst of a pandemic, assaulted me. This paradoxical reality seemed impossible to believe.

Emotions were taking over me when suddenly I felt great relief in the midst of my own chaos when I saw a familiar face. A nurse friend who was working in the

COVID area. My friend, realizing my presence, approached me, was very empathetic and affectionate, provided me with moral and psychological support that gave me a little calm. Little by little, I calmed down and was able to see the positive things in the environment, such as the fact that the area was clean and disinfected.

When I was finally consulted, the attention I received was as I had anticipated: precarious. Like the other people, they had prescribed me treatment as if what I had was a "common cold." This led me to feel sad and desperate again, especially when the doctor told me, "hospitalization is not necessary, go home." I followed the medical instructions, but the reality is that I did not feel well. When night fell, the intensity of my discomfort made me go to the consultation for the second time, but once again it was not possible to stay hospitalized because the doctor informed me that "There are no beds available in the hospital for you to stay, stay at home."

At that moment, I was overcome with fear of having to go back home and possibly infecting my daughters, but I had no alternative. They, upon learning that there were no beds and that my health was deteriorating, were scared and didn't know what to do. When I returned home, I couldn't think clearly and felt physically unwell. As a precaution for my family, I decided to isolate myself in my room. I was very confused and afraid; on one hand, I knew I needed medical attention, but there were no beds available, and on the other hand, if I were hospitalized, I didn't

know when I would see my daughters again.

## 2.2 The Visit

I feel very fortunate to have people who have become valuable friendships over the years, but none gave me as many blessings in life as the day my best friend came to my house. She is also a nurse, and despite knowing that visiting me could result in her getting infected, she came to check on me and evaluate my health. As soon as she saw me, she said, "You can't stay at home anymore. You have to go to the hospital. If you don't, you might not survive the illness." Hearing that, I experienced the greatest fear of my life. I had never felt anything like it before, but I knew she was right.

I had to muster up a lot of courage to say goodbye to my daughters, my mom, and the rest of my family. Then I got into my friend's car, and we headed to the hospital. The journey was tough, and my fear kept growing. That day, I didn't return home. I was hospitalized in a place where I no longer recognized anything or anyone. It wasn't the same place where I had worked and lived happy moments with great satisfaction. At that moment, all the staff were wearing protective gear, and the hospitalization area had become a space exclusively for treating people diagnosed with COVID. In the reserved area, there was an atmosphere of sadness and desolation.

Slowly, I lost track of time. I don't remember exactly how many days had

passed. The only constant was the fear that I never stopped feeling, which turned into terror when on December 31st, my health deteriorated even more. That day, my best friend, the same one who had taken me to the hospital, who was the head nurse in that area, approached me and said, "The doctor tells me that your lungs can't take it anymore. You have to be intubated." At that moment, I felt something cold run through my body. I remember pleading with her, "Please make sure they give me the necessary attention. I don't want to die. I entrust my daughters to you." I closed my eyes as tightly as I could and prayed to God, "Lord, I put myself in your hands. Make the most appropriate decision for me." That is my last memory of that moment.

## 2.3 The process of living or dying.

It may seem strange, but throughout the entire time I needed respiratory support, I thought and felt that my life was "normal." As if nothing had happened, my mind was able to create a parallel life where I didn't even know I was intubated. There were also moments when I experienced happiness, fear, and sadness accompanied by tears. On several occasions, I felt as if "someone" was pressing on my chest. I had the opportunity to "talk" with people who had already passed away; and I remember that, on repeated occasions, I "walked" through the hospital corridors. In general, according to the most significant moments that I experienced while intubated, I could describe them as "chapters" which I have very present and remember perfectly.

### ***2.3.1 First chapter***

The shortest of all chapters, I simply walked down a street in the town where I was born (Teziutlán, Puebla) where there is a church of the Virgen del Carmen. A place where I used to take my daughters when they were little and used to play.

### ***2.3.2 Second chapter***

I was having a conversation with a doctor who told me: "I'm going to transfer you to another clinic." We were going back and forth between different clinics and hospitals, since everywhere refused to receive me because I was "infected." What seemed incredible to me is that in those places, people had the shape of fruits.

### ***2.3.3 Third chapter***

I was in a place where there were sick people who told me: "You are the nurse who is going to take care of us." The area seemed like a very old movie, so much so that, although I tried, it was impossible for me to recognize the place, but the place seemed ancient.

### ***2.3.4 Fourth Chapter***

I remember dying and being immersed in what felt like a "movie," where I could see what was happening around me. I saw my mother crying bitterly, while my father tried to console her by saying, "Calm down." My mother felt misunderstood by that comment and told my dad, "You don't understand my feelings because you didn't give birth to her." At that moment, my best

friend arrived and told my mom, "I'm going to take you to see your daughter's body." Suddenly, everything before disappeared, and my daughters appeared crying, but I didn't understand why. I remember this chapter so clearly that it still causes me uncertainty and sadness, especially seeing my mother devastated.

### ***2.3.5 Fifth Chapter***

There I was, immersed in a "fight" or "game" (I'm not sure which) between two characters. One claimed to be an envoy from God, and the other claimed to be an envoy from hell. Where I ended up, whether heaven or hell, depended on the winner. Those were moments that became very strange because they caused me fear and sensations that I couldn't explain.

### ***2.3.6 Sixth Chapter***

I was standing in a very peaceful place that resembled a forest where there were people in the form of elves. I felt very nostalgic. The reason being, those people didn't allow me to enter because they said I had to first go through decontamination. However, at that moment, a man appeared and told them, "Let her pass, don't worry, I will give her medicine, and after that, she can interact with you. I will assign her a place where she can recover and be calm." Suddenly, I heard the voice of a friend and other friends who had come to visit me in that enigmatic place.

### ***2.3.7 Seventh Chapter***

The last moment I remember is in the same place as the previous chapter, where unexpectedly, I heard a supreme voice that said, "You're not going to die, don't worry." As that person spoke to me, I felt a strong tug in my chest accompanied by a very unpleasant sensation of "going and not going." Today, I know that sensation in my chest may have been the resuscitation I received.

All of these chapters are probably reflections of the emotions I experienced before being intubated and in relation to what I may have experienced, heard, or felt while sedated. I will never know for sure. It's evident that I've lost track of time between one chapter and the next. I remained intubated for a long time, where there were days when it seemed like I was going to die, and others where I was stable.

### *2.3.8 The Awakening*

After three months of uncertainty, anguish, and suffering for my family and friends, the doctor treating me spoke to my family and said, "There is nothing else we can do. Say goodbye to her, because we have done everything we can and she is not responding." However, one day before my 42nd birthday, to everyone's surprise, I was able to wake up from sedation. There was too much confusion in my head, I felt totally disoriented, I didn't know who I was or what I was doing there.

For a moment, I was very scared, but I felt relieved to "hear my daughters' voices," but that was impossible because they still weren't allowed to come in and see me.

Gradually, I became aware of my reality - I was connected to a ventilator, I had a tracheostomy! There were many machines around me; immediately, I remembered the times in my professional life when I found myself in that same scenario, but I was the nurse! This time, I was the patient! It was an extremely impactful moment.

Once I was aware of my surroundings and what was happening, the days became so hard and complex that I wouldn't want to experience anything like that again. In my room, one doctor came in and another went out, they came and went. They constantly took blood gases, which caused me a lot of pain. Until March 28, 2021, the best day up until then, they told me that I would be discharged, I could go home.

It was a very beautiful moment but full of fear for my daughters because I was going home with the tracheostomy. At that time, I didn't imagine what it would be like to go home with it, I didn't know how difficult it would be to stop relying on that small hole to breathe normally, or the anxiety or panic I would experience. That day, the nurses and doctors who had attended to me for so many days said goodbye. I finally went home!

During my stay in the hospital, I always had the support of people who care about me and who stayed around me all the time, keeping an eye on my health. However, I went through very difficult and hard times that I wouldn't want to experience again. I can't even imagine what my mother went through with my severity and not being able to visit me in the hospital because it

wasn't allowed. We have talked about it in tears, and she has told me that this situation caused her a trauma that she remembers bitterly.

### *2.3.9 The Recovery*

I think the hardest part of this experience has been the recovery. The reason is that despite having physical therapy and rehabilitation sessions, as well as specialized medical attention, my body was left with various significant sequelae, which limit me from continuing my life normally.

It has been a real challenge to face and adapt to my new life. Seeing my autonomy limited, losing the job that brought me so much satisfaction, and the activities I used to do regularly has been very painful for me, to the point that I have questioned whether surviving COVID was a good thing or not.

Unfortunately, I don't think I'm the only one who thinks that way at times. Anyone who has experienced a similar situation could question the same thing.

I have to admit that, although it has been difficult for me, I thank God for allowing me to live. I have truly fought every day to achieve my physical, emotional, and spiritual recovery.

And today, thanks to this testimonial memory, I have been able to come to the conclusion that if I am here, it is because God has allowed it and for some purpose He has for me. Among the strategies that

have helped me to recover physically and emotionally are music therapy, deep meditation, inhalation therapy, and physical rehabilitation. In this sense, the day my therapist placed a mirror in front of me as part of the session left a profound impact on my life.

For a moment, I didn't seem to recognize myself, I experienced pain, I felt that I was not the same, it was a very striking confrontation for me. Finally, I was able to appreciate every achievement I had made up to that point, and I was able to establish that the small goals and challenges I had set for myself were being completed or were in progress.

### **3. Conclusion**

The experience I had with COVID has been an event that has marked my life. It is clear that not only I have been in this situation, but a sector of society has as well. However, based on my experience, I would like to recommend that we should strengthen our healthcare systems, as this pandemic has taught us that we are vulnerable people and that we must be united as a society.

I would also like our national healthcare system to review the regulation of retirement and pensions. As I mentioned before, the effects of COVID-19 made it impossible for me to continue working as a specialized nurse.

Unfortunately, the institution I worked for decided to terminate my contract without any financial commitment (such as a

pension, compensation, etc.), which has made it difficult for me both personally and financially for my family.

Public health institutions, while they have a commitment to the beneficiaries and/or people who seek consultation or treatment, have an unavoidable moral (and undoubtedly legal) commitment to the staff who work in the institution, who in reality make it possible for the entity to fulfill the social function entrusted to it by the State. It is not the institution's hand that holds the syringe or places the gauze.

## References

- Agren, D. (2020). Understanding Mexican health worker COVID-19 deaths. *The Lancet*, 396(10254), 807. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)31955-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31955-3)
- Escudero, X., Guarner, J., Galindo-Fraga, A., Escudero-Salamanca, M., Alcocer-Gamba, M. A., & Del-Río, C. (2020). The SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) coronavirus pandemic: Current situation and implications for Mexico. *Archivos de Cardiología de Mexico*, 90, 7-14. <https://doi.org/10.24875/ACM.M20000064>
- Friedman, J., Calderón-Villarreal, A., Bojorquez, I., Vera Hernández, C., Schriger, D. L., & Tovar Hirashima, E. (2020). Excess Out-of-Hospital Mortality and Declining Oxygen Saturation: The Sentinel Role of Emergency Medical Services Data in the COVID-19 Crisis in Tijuana, Mexico. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 76(4), 413-426. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annemergmed.2020.07.035>
- Holshue, M. L., DeBolt, C., Lindquist, S., Lofy, K. H., Wiesman, J., Bruce, H., Spitters, C., Ericson, K., Wilkerson, S., Tural, A., Diaz, G., Cohn, A., Fox, L., Patel, A., Gerber, S. I., Kim, L., Tong, S., Lu, X., Lindstrom, S., ... Pillai, S. K. (2020). First Case of 2019 Novel Coronavirus in the United States. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 382(10), 929-936. <https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmoa2001191>
- Trilla, A. (2020). Un mundo, una salud: la epidemia por el nuevo coronavirus COVID-19. *Medicina Clínica*, 155(6), 272. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.medcli.20.05.015>
- Wu, P., Hao, X., Lau, E. H. Y., Wong, J. Y., Leung, K. S. M., Wu, J. T., Cowling, B. J., & Leung, G. M. (2020). Real-time tentative assessment of the epidemiological characteristics of novel coronavirus infections in Wuhan, China, as at 22 January 2020. *Eurosurveillance*, 25(3), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2020.25.3.200004>