

The biggest thing I want Congress to understand is that what I witnessed on the front lines during COVID was not normal healthcare. As an experienced registered nurse, I watched long established standards of patient care, infection control, staffing, and basic clinical practice change almost overnight.

During my deployment to Metropolitan Hospital in New York City, I worked 21 consecutive days in the emergency department without a day off. Nurses on the front line were told that personal protective equipment was scarce and were required to reuse the same N95 mask for five days, storing it in a paper bag between shifts. I later discovered a locked utility room filled with PPE. At the same time, some nurses were being paid while remaining in their hotel rooms instead of being rotated in to relieve exhausted staff who were working every day.

I witnessed COVID positive patients being discharged from the emergency department back to nursing homes, even though isolation of infectious patients had always been a fundamental part of nursing practice. I also saw patients who were not confirmed to have COVID being treated and cohorted as though they did, placing COVID positive and non COVID patients in the same environment.

During a later deployment in Texas, I witnessed physicians who would not enter COVID patient rooms, even when patients were rapidly deteriorating. During active resuscitations, including patients who were coding, I saw physicians remain outside the room while nurses and other staff attempted to provide care. In my years of nursing, that was not normal practice.

What concerns me most is how quickly practices that would previously have raised serious ethical and clinical concerns became accepted under the justification of an emergency. I want Congress to understand that healthcare professionals who were there saw things that deserve serious investigation. The patients who died, their families, and the healthcare workers who witnessed these events deserve transparency, accountability, and an honest examination of what happened so that it is never repeated.