

My late husband and I both became very sick with COVID-19 late September 2020. After about a week, I slowly began to recover, but Aldo', my husband's cough continued to worsen. He eventually went to the emergency room, where he was diagnosed with COVID pneumonia. He was prescribed antibiotics, but they made no difference. Within days, his breathing became so labored that he was losing oxygen and his skin began turning grayish-blue. I panicked because I couldn't help him breathe, so I called 911. The paramedics immediately placed him on oxygen and rushed him to the hospital. Because of COVID restrictions, I was told I could not accompany him. Watching him leave alone was one of the most helpless moments of my life. I cried, wondering who would care for him, comfort him, or advocate for him when I couldn't be there. I was instructed to remain isolated at home while he was hospitalized to prevent further COVID exposure. That meant I couldn't see my children either. We were all separated from one another during one of the most frightening seasons of our lives. None of us were allowed to visit Aldo in the hospital. We felt scared, powerless, and alone. A few days into his hospitalization, Aldo texted me saying he was thirsty and hungry because he wasn't receiving enough water or food. My son tried to bring bottled water and healthy snacks to the hospital, but they were refused. To this day, I don't know if he was adequately hydrated or nourished during that time. Every day I spoke with his nurses and doctors—often multiple times a day. They told me he was receiving Remdesivir, yet every report showed his condition continuing to decline. His lung X-rays weren't improving. Desperate, daily-I pleaded with his physicians to try hydroxychloroquine along with vitamin therapy. They were reluctant and clearly frustrated with my request, but eventually agreed to try it. The following day Aldo actually seemed to improve. We were even told there was a possibility he could come home if his oxygen levels continued to rise. For a brief moment, we had hope. But 2 days later I was informed that the hydroxychloroquine "wasn't working," so it was discontinued. I fought for it to be continued but to no avail. One of his main Doctors told me how dare I tell the hospital what to use for treatment for my husband. As I reviewed his medical records afterward, I discovered that the Remdesivir had never been stopped during the days the hydroxychloroquine was given. From there, everything rapidly declined. His kidneys began failing. His lungs became progressively worse. Until Aldo could no longer speak, he kept telling me how much pain he was in. Then I received the phone call every family fears. The doctor said they needed to place him on a ventilator-it was the only way he could breathe. Aldo did not want to be put on it, but he was told it was his only option or he could suffocate. I was on the phone as the doctor explained everything to both of us. We felt like there was no choice. Just before they wheeled him away, I was still on the phone with him. I cried out, "Aldo, you won't die! You're coming home soon!" Those were the last words I ever spoke to my husband. 16 days of fighting for his life, and less than 48 hours later on a ventilator, he died. October 16, 2020. He was only 59 years old. We had been married for 32 years. Because of the hospital restrictions, he died alone, without me or our children by his side. In a matter of days, our lives were forever changed. Our family was devastated, left trying to comprehend the unimaginable. To this day, I still ask the question that has echoed in my heart ever since: What just happened?