

My sister, **Audrey Marie Velicka**, was 55 years old when she was admitted to St. Vincent Ascension Southside Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida, on July 5, 2021, after experiencing COVID-19 symptoms for about two weeks. She thought it was asthma or a sinus infection and she became concerned when her breathing became more difficult.

My parents brought Audrey to the hospital. A nurse took Audrey's oxygen level and found it was 69% and then hurriedly took Audrey to receive treatment. My mother was not asked to go with her. Audrey was asked whether she was vaccinated and then put on oxygen. Although Audrey was immediately given remdesivir on that first day, she was denied water and was given limited attention. Her nasal cannula was hurting her nose as it was left to dry and when she called for a nurse to assist her to the bathroom, no one responded and she ended up lying in her own urine. The hospital staff told Audrey she would need a ventilator or she would die.

After three days of limited care, she was transferred to the ICU. She told us not to worry because now at least there were nurses nearby monitoring her. On my first visit, her fifth day in the hospital, I watched the nurse administer something in her IV. When questioned, the nurse informed me that Audrey was receiving her fifth and final dose of remdesivir. When I asked whether she could receive vitamin C or zinc, we were told it wouldn't help and they did not provide it.

At that time, we were allowed to visit just two hours a day.

Audrey then was receiving oxygen through a BiPAP mask that made her feel extremely claustrophobic. She struggled to keep up with the oxygen and was becoming exhausted. We became concerned about her care and asked for a transfer to Mayo Clinic. We waited all day for a response from Mayo Clinic but were told she was denied because they would give her the same treatment. Audrey believed they were lying to her. At that same time a doctor entered her room and informed us Audrey was doing better.

On July 10th, the doctor pressured Audrey to go on a ventilator, claiming her body needed to "rest". Audrey succumbed to their pressures. At that point, the hospital shutdown to visitors.

On July 14th, Audrey was extubated. She was then required to pass a swallow test to receive water. She failed tests on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. She told me another test would not be done until Monday because, in her words, "the hospital closes down over the weekend." She had not had a sip of water since she arrived.

At approximately 3:00 a.m. on July 17th, Audrey called me from her cell phone, frantic. She said they were ventilating her again but did not know why. She said, "I have to go. They're coming." When I asked her to put the phone on speaker, I heard chaos and asked why she was being ventilated. I was told that Audrey had a pulmonary embolism. That ventilation caused a hole in Audrey's lung. My last words to Audrey were, **"Put your faith in God."** I never spoke to her again.

Over the next few weeks our family was repeatedly asked to sign a DNR and authorize palliative care. We refused as we didn't give up on Audrey. She remained on the ventilator for 19 more days and her situation became grave. We were told if we wanted to be with her, we had to sign a DNR. Audrey died on August 5th, 2021, alone. To our knowledge, no attempt was made to resuscitate her.

Based on what our family witnessed and what Audrey told us, I believe hospital protocols contributed to, if not caused Audrey's death. Her story needs to be heard.