



November, 2020

Dear Friend,

If I squint my eyes enough, the lights on the ventilators in the ICU twinkle like the ones on a Christmas tree and the nursing team look like elves dressed in colourful blues & yellows as they go about their work.

Even though we try to bring the joy and cheer of the season to our patients & their loved ones, the Intensive Care Unit at Ajax Pickering Hospital is nothing like Santa's Workshop. Especially this year.

And as we head into Christmas, I wish that we could see an end in sight to the pandemic so that our patients and the hardworking ICU team can celebrate "like normal" the festive season with their families and loved ones.

But, we already know that over the coming months our ICU will continue to be full of very sick patients.

As a valued supporter of the Ajax Pickering Hospital, you need to know the important role you play, every day of the year, and maybe even more so right now.

Your generosity lets us tend to all our patients' needs – whether the need is as complicated as providing lifesaving treatment or as simple as a comforting touch.

Will you please share a kind *gift of health* this holiday season? Your donation of will mean so much to me and all my colleagues who are celebrating the season at Ajax Pickering Hospital this year rather than home with our loved ones.

over...

With the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic our community's need for critical services placed even more stress on our hospital's ICU and its skilled specialized medical teams.

And the need for more lifesaving equipment, like ventilators - that your donation today will help fund - has become even more vital.

Usually, a ventilator is needed only for a short time – hours or maybe a few days. But as we have seen with COVID-19 cases, that timeline has been exponentially prolonged, so more patients are on life support for longer, now averaging weeks at a time.

I can only imagine the fear and anxiety that the patients' families must feel when this happens.

They can only watch & wait as their husband, mother or loved one is placed into a medically-induced coma so that a tube can be inserted into the windpipe all the way to the lungs.

The silence is now filled with beeps and blinks that are coming from the ventilator that has taken over the patient's breathing and is hooked up to them by tubes, wires and multiple IV lines. And masked people in gowns, gloves and face shields that obscure any form of recognition are constantly coming in and out of the room to monitor or adjust the machine's levels.

This happened with Steve.

When he tested positive for COVID-19, he got so sick that he was admitted to our ICU and had to be put onto a ventilator.

His wife, Lynda, was really scared.

Regularly, Steve is a bit of a chatterbox, and even though she joked that this was the longest that Steve had gone without talking, we could tell that she was desperately trying to put on a brave face.

Because Steve kept testing positive for COVID - and for her safety - Lynda could only watch at the window of her husband's room as he lay unconscious, his chest rhythmically going up and down.

She would follow every move that the doctors, nurses or respiratory therapists made in Steve's room. Wondering if today was the day that Steve would be deemed well enough to be taken off the ventilator.

But I would watch Steve's nurse as she went in to check on him. Every day, she would lean in and tell him when Lynda was there, just outside the door. Making sure that he knew that he wasn't alone.

And there were a few nights when I was leaving late, that I would see that same nurse sitting with Steve, beside his bed, holding his hand.

Her shift would have ended, and she should already have headed home to her own family. Instead, there she was, still caring for Steve... giving him a comforting squeeze to let him know that she was there.

I sometimes lay awake at night thinking about my staff and how compassionate and resilient they are...

But due to the pandemic, over seventy percent of our patients require life support in the form of invasive ventilator therapy, and even my strongest team members are starting to have a hard time watching patients who are severely ill and struggling to breathe.

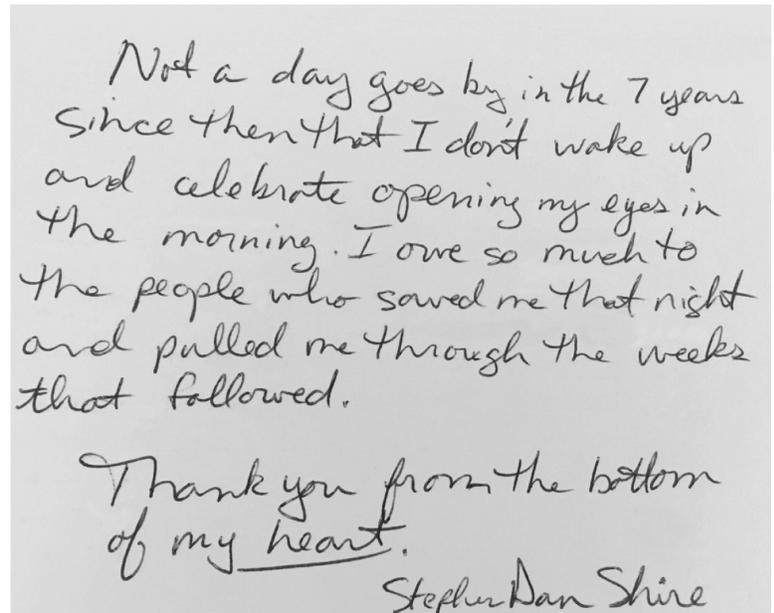
We can fix broken equipment, but we can't "fix" a broken nurse.

They work so hard to look after those in their care, as well as lending a shoulder of support to family members who are overwhelmed by everything that is going on with their loved one in the ICU.

That is why it is important to me to celebrate - in some way - this Christmas season, and try and put up some decorations in the unit and arrange a Secret Santa amongst the staff.

I also am sharing personal notes that I have been receiving from patients, like this one from Dan...

Just like our COVID-19 patients, he too had to be placed into an induced coma; and his wife Karen specifically remembers one of the ICU nurses staying with him and being his "guardian angel".



Not a day goes by in the 7 years since then that I don't wake up and celebrate opening my eyes in the morning. I owe so much to the people who saved me that night and pulled me through the weeks that followed.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Stephen Dan Shire

Because, you see, regardless of the time of day, the day of the week or the specialness of the day, the staff provide the same great lifesaving and compassionate care to their patients 365 days a year...

They know there will be good days and bad days; shifts that end in sadness along with happy goodbyes when a patient is discharged (like when Steve got to go home).

And, they are scared of the pandemic too. But every day, the team's commitment to their ICU patients always outweighs their own feelings.

over...

I hope you understand just how important it is for all of the ICU team to know that we can count on you to help us provide both lifesaving and compassionate care to those in our unit both until we see the end of COVID-19 as well as every day after that.

**I know that you are probably receiving lots of requests at this time to year, but I'm hoping we can count on you again.**

Will you please share a meaningful gift with the Ajax Pickering Hospital this Christmas season?

**Your remarkable support is why we all pour our hearts and souls into our work, making sure our patients can count on us like we count on you.**

And this is even more evident at this time of year.

Your kind and thoughtful *gift of health* will help every person I work with provide both the lifesaving & compassionate care we are known for to all of our neighbours and loved ones.

Thank you for being by our side.

All the best of the season to you and yours,

*Tania*

Tania Del Rizzo  
Manager, ICU

P.S. Your special holiday donation means so much to me and the rest of the dedicated, hardworking staff at Ajax Pickering Hospital. Thank you for sharing the spirit of the season and for giving the *gift of health!*

