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“COVID-19 Hospital Isolation Affects More Than Just the Sick”

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My left hip and its osteoarthritis will “leave the building” August 4. At pre-op testing, a nurse explained that [surging COVID prompted a return to strict visitor protocol](#): 1 per day.

Weeks ago, my mom booked a flight, planning to wait out the surgery alongside my partner. She'll now remain at home, as will other beloveds—all of them vaccinated.

I first experienced this protocol in December. My partner's mom, a 5-year veteran of ovarian cancer, became acutely ill with sepsis. In the hospital and ICU: 1 visitor, her husband. Friends, brothers, sons, and grandkids lost in-person contact for all but her life's final days, when she entered hospice (which also had COVID-induced visitation limits).

At the close of 2020, [COVID ran roughshod](#). Restrictions felt heartbreaking but understandable. No one in our household was vaccinated or eligible. Without complaint, we did our part to protect patients, visitors, and heroic staff. Duty to a common good already had meant lonely, exhausting months of masking, working and schooling from home (privileges many others lacked), distancing, isolating. I just saw my older brother for the first time in over 2 years.

By now, the U.S. could have vaccinated ourselves to herd immunity. Instead, it seems likely (assuming humanity wins the race against vaccine-resistant mutations) we will reach it the old-fashioned way. As a professor, I worry that virtually every student who arrives on campus unprotected will contract COVID, now a [“pandemic of the unvaccinated.”](#) However safe our classrooms, many young adults will make young-adult choices in their social lives.

I have a nephew under 12 and immunocompromised friends. I don't consider unvaccinated persons an undifferentiated mass of the selfish and/or stupid. I live amid multiple vaccination sites. My partner, his kids, and I have reliable transportation, decent internet connectivity, and flexible schedules; these enabled us to access the vaccine within days of qualifying. Had side effects been worse, my partner and I could have taken time off at full pay. One manifestation of our White privilege is that we inherited no distrust grounded in histories of [government-sponsored medical experimentation](#) and genocide.

We battle 2 viruses, COVID and disinformation. None of us is immune to propaganda. Corporations that benefit from [addiction to opioids](#), tobacco and [fossil fuels](#) already had perfected seductive invitations to distrust science. We reap the poison profiteers sow.

Governor “Don't-Fauci-my-Florida”-beer-koozi-shilling DeSantis and other “small-government” Republicans stripped self-determination from our communities. No local mandates. No passport for a vaccinated beloved.

COVID officially has killed 4.2 million, including 612,000 in the U.S. and 39,000 Floridians. Their beloveds (and those of millions more uncounted and to come) never can be made whole.

I feel indignant that all but 1 of my vaccinated network will be barred from the hospital. At the same time, I am overwhelmingly likely to survive and benefit from my stay. My partner will weather the extra responsibility. We walk this privileged path together.

None of us ever will know how many perish(ed) from COVID accompanied only by hospital staff--or completely alone.

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