

A NURSE'S STORY DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC 2020

BY: Gloria Stephens April 2021(with approval of C. Weatherbie for her story)

During the covid-19 pandemic nurses all over the world have been on the 'front-line', day and night performing their 'Duty of Care', dressed in unbelievable attire, making their work environment, most of the time, hard to bear. Although concern for their own health and the possibility of carrying the virus to their 'loved ones' they stayed their post, providing the utmost care, relieving pain and enabling many of their patients to die with dignity. Because of the pandemic restrictions they also did their best to be a substitute for family members when their patients were dying and at death. Dealing with all of this put an enormous strain on nurses and the nursing profession as a whole. It has been documented that many nurses in various parts of the world succumbed to the virus. There are other nurses who suffered a grievous illness not due to the virus, like so many during this unusual time, were without the quick response and need of special medically and nursing care. The following is the story of such a nurse who received a liver transplant during covid.

CINDY WEATHERBIE's Story of Survival and

Her Wish for Education and Support to the Opt-out in Organ & Tissue Donation Canada Wide

Cindy Weatherbie was an active Registered Nurse at the Colchester Hospital in Truro, Nova

Scotia, as an Operating Room nurse for 40 years. It was during this

working phase that she became ill. This 61 year old nurse knew

instinctively that something was wrong when she showed symptoms

of fatigue, body itching and having to go to the bathroom frequently.

Moving her legs and arms became 'sluggish' as the disease

worsened and at one point she fell and fractured her arm. She was

finally diagnosed with stage 4 liver cancer and primary cholangitis

causing the bile ducts in the liver to deteriorate, which is a 'life-

threatening' disease and requires a liver transplant. She was placed

on the wait-list for a liver donation in February 2018. During the 21/2 years waiting for a donor, she was supported by her daughter Heida and son Michael who remained at her side throughout the whole process, taking her to appointments and clinics under covid 19 restrictions. Thus additional stress on everyone.

CINDY WEATHERBIE, RN

Cindy was a graduate from the Aberdeen School of Nursing, Antigonish Nova Scotia in 1980. She has stated that, as an operating nurses she “knew too much”, making all the more difficult to face the liver transplant and the long recovery period ahead of her. She was called twice that a liver was available but for various reasons the procedure was cancelled at the last minute which was even more to deal with and all the time becoming more ill. “I decided that it was time, before I go ‘under the knife’, to make all my funeral arrangement and all the other legal components when death seems eminent”. After completing this she read a story of a young liver transplant survivor, in Cape Breton, NS, and they became friends which gave her the support and hope to fight for life. Finally the call came reporting that a donated liver was available and to report to the Victoria General Hospital where the procedure took place in August, 2020.

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Cindy’s recovery time was plagued with complications and one major one was a stroke caused by a blockage of the hepatic vein due to a blood clot. Following the stroke she experienced slurred speech and her right leg dragged as she attempted to walk. Cindy and her two adult children have actively advocated for improved polices and procedure for keeping family members abreast of changes in the health status of their loved one. There was a major lack of communication as the family did not know for quite some time that their Mother had suffered a stroke. This was made known to them when Cindy called herself and because of the slurred speech it took some time for Cindy to commutate her condition with her children, to their shock and amazement. There were

also times when treatment was performed without any explanations and when Cindy would question, the reply was: "Well you're a nurse, you should know". Cindy's reply followed: "Well I'm the patient now, not the nurse". At the same time Cindy was thankful for her support and realized that other patients may not have even that much.

It is remarkable how well Cindy has managed this complication and she said: "Every day is a gift because you're looking in the positive direction ... you're grateful at the end of the day for someone else's loss was our family's gift".

Cindy is now an advocate for Organ & Tissue Donations to be Canada wide as the donor organization in Nova Scotia, which is by Legislation a 'Opt-Out' system under the revised previous program to the: 'Human Organ & Tissue Donation Act'. This act, the first in Canada, provides suitable organ & tissue donations of anyone 18 years and older to be automatically a donor following death unless the person officially 'Opt-Out', as being one.

This particular program (OPT-OUT) requires considerable public education on how it works, value to others, and eliminate fear and concern to be a donor. There was an article on this very subject in the Chronical Herald in April, 2021, titled: 'Education Lacking On Opt-out Law' by Nebal Snan, who is a local journalist initiative reporter. (This position is supported by the federal government.) In the article Snan told a story of a boy being born with kidney dysplasia, where one or both of the baby's kidneys do not develop normally while in the womb. So the first six months of the baby's life he was on dialysis. When reaching the age of 19 months, his father gave him a kidney but unfortunately this kidney is in decline and therefore has been placed on the 'wait-list' for another kidney. Another concern with organ transplants is rejection, which this patient had many episodes. When the article was presented there were 200 in Nova Scotia on the 'wait-list'.

So these folks are in hope that the donation numbers will increase with the new program of 'Opt-out'. There is a strict criteria which must be met so the success is still to be determined as the

criteria limits the acceptance of many organs. Dr. Stephen Beed, who is the medical director of the NS Organ and Tissue program and is encouraged with the recent revised Human Organ and Tissue Donation Act. Dr Beed also stated that he has received many requests for more education programs

for the medical and nursing health-care teams and the public as a whole, in the total concepts of organ & tissue donation and the surgical procedure of doing transplants, which would be a step in the right direction.

During the interview with Cindy, she also reflected and 'sees promise in living transplants' as being donors. This type of procedure took place at a hospital in Toronto, where 70% of a live donor's liver is donated and both livers regenerate.

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"I would like our retired and active nurses who , along with myself, belong to the Nursing History NS Society, to help me promote this organ and tissue act and to have other provinces, especially the Atlantic Provinces, to come aboard, along with the rest of Canada. There is no other gift received that is more valued and appreciated as the one providing life and a legacy to the person who donated the organ or tissue". "I received a liver transplant and realize, just because you have a liver transplant, life is not over". This attitude can be made of all donated organ and tissue transplants.

What does the future hold with this Opt-out system for donating? Time will tell as everyone is in hopes that the program will be a success and a legacy of Nova Scotia's innovative health –care system.