

The Des Moines Register

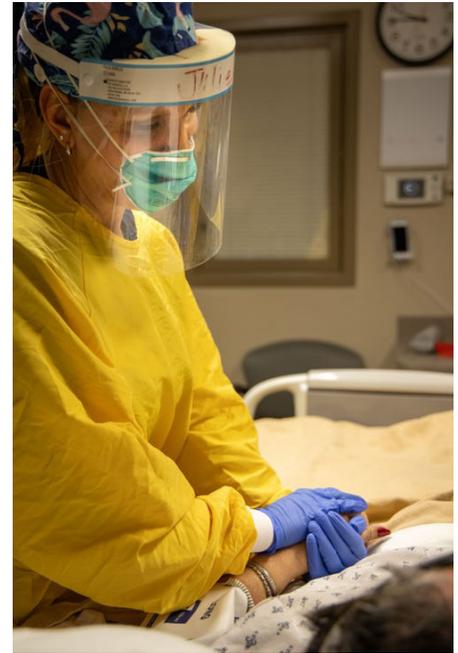
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PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

'Inside COVID's Siege' series takes readers inside an Iowa hospital as doctors, nurses fight a plague



Dr. Tamim Mahayni talks with COVID-19 patient Thong Sengphirom after her transfer to the ICU at Mary Greeley Medical Center in Ames, Iowa, Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2020.



Mary Greeley Medical Center ICU nurse Julie Scibold holds patient Thong Sengphirom's hand as she is transferred to the ICU Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2020.

Carol Hunter, Des Moines Register

“If you’ve had discussions before, say, ‘I don’t want to be put on life support,’ now’s the time to have that conversation,” he tells her.

Her condition is worsening, he says, and she’ll likely need to be put on a breathing machine.

Then he feels compelled to explain something even more disheartening: “I don’t know if it would help or not.”

The coronavirus is taking its relentless, unpredictable path. He and his patient are fighting it, but her life is in the balance.

Doctors and nurses

have received deserved praise as front-line heroes of the coronavirus pandemic. But few outside the ecosystem of a hospital can understand what they go through each day in battling COVID-19, or, after 10 months, just how exhausted they are. Or how helpless they feel when science still has so few answers for why one COVID patient lives and another dies.

The Register’s occasional series, “Inside COVID’s Siege,” brings readers to the bedside as doctors, nurses and their patients battle this plague. I thank Mary Greeley’s leaders for recognizing

the need to tell this story and allowing the access to report it.

For a week, Iowa Columnist Courtney Crowder and Boyden-Holmes spent time on the COVID floor and in the emergency room, the intensive care unit and other usually off-limits areas, then were welcomed back for follow-up reporting. Hospital staff worked with Courtney and Zach to secure patients’ permission to speak with them and use their names and images. Otherwise, we agreed to describe scenes or shoot images in ways that patients weren’t identifiable.

The series is a continuation of the Register’s commitment to document how COVID-19 has reshaped life in Iowa. I thank our subscribers, whose support makes major projects like “Inside COVID’s Siege” possible. I invite people who read the Register occasionally but do not yet subscribe to take that step, to support this work and other local reporting on our schools, communities, businesses and sports teams.

Our main priority in covering the pandemic is to bring you accurate information to help you make decisions on how best to protect you and

INSIDE COVID'S SIEGE



Nurse Connor Ramirez, respiratory therapist Kristin Hoffland and nurse Julie Scebold work to transfer COVID-19 patient Thong Sengphirom to the ICU at Mary Greeley Medical Center in Ames, Iowa, Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2020.



Dr. Tamim Mahayni looks in on a COVID-19 patient during morning rounds in ICU at Mary Greeley Medical Center Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2020.



Dr. Tamim Mahayni works to decide if a COVID-19 patient is ready to be taken off a respirator as he oversees care in ICU at Mary Greeley Medical Center Monday, Dec. 7, 2020.



ICU nurse Wanda Ross takes a moment to herself as she cares for COVID-19 patient Thong Sengphirom at Mary Greeley Medical Center in Ames, Iowa Friday, Dec. 11, 2020.



Respiratory therapist Sally Balvanz and ICU nurse Abbey Malone remove the breathing tube to take a COVID-19 patient off the ventilator at Mary Greeley Medical Center in Ames, Iowa, Monday, Dec. 7, 2020.



Jan Beeghly recovers in a room on the COVID floor at Mary Greeley Medical Center in Ames, Iowa, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2020.

your family. We're focused now on the vaccine rollout in Iowa, tracking down everything from when you can get shots to how many Iowans have been vaccinated. We're also digging into how the

coronavirus is affecting this year's legislative session and state spending. And our team is working on a package of reporting to mark the first full year since the virus arrived in Iowa.

As part of our effort to keep you informed, we've repeatedly pressured the state government to release more data about COVID-19 outbreaks and to conduct vital discussions about COVID-19

policy in public. (Sadly, the state has rejected a request by the Register and other media to open meetings of an advisory council that is recommending which groups will get priority for the vaccine.)

INSIDE COVID'S SIEGE



Another top priority is to report on the government's response to the pandemic and subsequent economic fallout and to hold officials accountable for the impact of their decisions. For example, jobs and economy reporter Tyler Jett has exposed snags and errors that have delayed unemployment benefits for Iowans who desperately need the money for food and rent.

We've also endeavored to tell the stories of Iowans, their despair and their triumphs, in this

extraordinary time. Our ongoing "Iowa Mourns" series, produced in partnership with Lee Enterprises newspapers in Iowa, profiles Iowans lost to COVID-19. They deserve to be remembered for the rich lives they led, rather than merely as a number in an ever-climbing death toll. The "Inside COVID's Siege" series takes readers behind the doors of a hospital where staff members are giving their all to prevent that toll from climbing, but suffering a profound toll them-

selves in the process.

At some moments, Courtney and Zach have told me, this was a story they reported and photographed with tears in their eyes. As they drove back from Ames, instead of exchanging the usual journalism banter about the strongest quotes or images, they sometimes rode in silence, struggling to absorb the fortitude and heartache they had just witnessed.

I salute the heroes of Mary Greeley and other hospitals across Iowa as

they battle the COVID siege, and commend this compelling series to your attention.



Crowder



Boyden-Holmes

Courtney Crowder is the Register's Iowa Columnist and the editor of Iowa Mourns, the Register's collection of obituaries written to honor Iowans who have died from COVID-19. Reach her at ccrowder@dmreg.com or 515-284-8360. Follow her on Twitter @courtneycare.

Zach Boyden-Holmes is a photographer for the Register. Follow him on Twitter @Boydenphoto.

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