# Reflections from the Frontline of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Oncologist Aaron D. Viny, MD, shares how he's been treating cancer patients during COVID-19 via Twitter

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By Former Damon Runyon Fellow Aaron D. Viny, MD

Former Damon Runyon Fellow Aaron D. Viny, MD, cares for people with leukemia and myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) at Memorial Sloan Kettering as an oncologist specializing in blood cancers. Recently, Dr. Viny spent two weeks treating cancer patients in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are his reflections from his twitter thread as a physician-scientist at a unique time in medical history.

2/ We continued to give world class care to our patients, but that meant high risk exposures to my team and myself. Friends and colleagues with cough or other concerning symptoms were sent immediately for testing thanks to the amazing laboratory medicine dept efforts by @EBabady

— (((Aaron Viny MD))) (@TheDoctorIsVin) April 12, 2020

3/ Many healthcare workers were found to be positive and went home with a range of disease severity and symptomatology. One thing was clear--our exposure risks were just as much from each other as from the patients. #HeroesOfCovid19

4/ In stressful situations, we try to control what we can. Mine was in the form of carrying a spray

bottle of 70% ethyl alcohol (one of the perks of being a laboratory based physician-scientist) everywhere with me--spraying phones, pens, elevator buttons, door handles.

5/ I doubt it made much difference, but it certainly gave me a place to focus my fear and uncertainty. Each day felt like a complicated battle. Who was the enemy? Of course not the patients, but every human interaction instilled the real possibility of contracting the virus.

6/ For many young healthcare workers, the virus is self limited and not life-threatening. In real time, we saw colleagues with far worse outcomes. I am a bone marrow transplant survivor, followed by @DrTonorezos, who vocalized the realities of my risk that I was trying to ignore.

8/ My time on service was the most physically and emotionally exhausting of my career. The most difficult was having to discuss end of life decisions with patients and family members over the phone--seeing the fear in a patient's eyes when making the most challenging of decisions

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9/ Alone.

10/ The other stark reality is the fear that for patients with end-stage cancer, a delay in making these decisions meant the real possibility of needing emergent CPR. These measures are rarely successful, and would mean significant viral exposure to an entire critical care team.

11/ So, the pressure was on at all levels.

13/ I dropped off groceries on the doorstep in exchange for home cooked meals and blowing kisses from ~10 feet down the hall. pic.twitter.com/rP5Du8DRLS

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14/ Then service was over. This whole time, I was so fortunate to have a friend who left the city and let me stay at their apartment. After multiple high risk exposures, we decided it was best for me to self-quarantine an additional 2 weeks. It was really lonely.

15/ Loneliness lets dark thoughts creep into your head. Then, you get email forwards asking for my interpretation of the most recent hot-garbage conspiracy theory of how 5G damaged cells are how #COVID19 was created or that it's a deep state hoax.

16/ So, the loneliness gets replaced with anger. Neither are productive. They get in the way of far more important work, they get in the way of sleep, they even keep me from fully enjoying my daily FaceTime calls with my family.

17/ But tomorrow that changes. Tomorrow I am back home with a particularly spunky curly-haired kid and her mom whom I deeply love and is the greatest human I've ever met.

18/ This month was really difficult, but it was made far far less horrible by the outpouring of love and support from friends at every aspect of our lives. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. @rosslevinemd @RossLevineLab @mebeingfrank @jwspear @SherylWein @iwfnyc @dsobes

19/ ...and thank you to the person that made this sanity-saving, toddler-taming trampoline! Stay safe! Stay home!

20/ Happy Easter to those who celebrate and Happy Passover from the Viny Family. עוד תראה, עוד תראהכמה טוב יהיה בשנה, בשנה הבאה You will see, you will see How good it will be Next Year

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