

THE FIGHT OF A LIFETIME

BRMH'S ROSA BLACKDEER SHARES EXPERIENCE OF CARING FOR COVID PATIENTS IN NYC HOTSPOT

"Please just kill me," Maria told her nurse Rosa Blackdeer on a regular basis. "Just let me go."

For any healthcare provider, carefully listening to the needs of the patient is key to a healthy outcome. Not this time.

"Nope, that's not an option," Blackdeer, the medical/surgical director at Black River Memorial Hospital, recalls telling her elderly patient, who was battling COVID-19. "You'll pull through this. We have the medications you need. You're strong and we can do this."



"Please just kill me... Just let me go"

Maria told her nurse Rosa Blackdeer on a regular basis.

It was one of many experiences Blackdeer never will forget while providing care to COVID patients at Lincoln Medical Center in the Bronx, New York, in April and May last year as the area became one of the nation's first "hotspots."

She received the call at 10 a.m. on a Saturday to deploy as part of her service as an Air Force Reservist. She enjoyed a quick celebration with her husband and three children "because we didn't know if we were going to see each other again." By 8 a.m. the next day, Blackdeer was on her way to take part in a battle unlike any she'd seen.

"When I go into a war zone, I know what to expect," she said. "This one was unexpected. It was a disease where no one knew what was happening. It was a disease no one knew how to control. So (the anxiety) hits you all at once."

Soon, Blackdeer was living through the frightening moments the rest of us were watching on TV or reading about as COVID overwhelmed New York City. From personal protective equipment shortages to severely unfavorable patient-provider ratios to running out of supplies, "it was rough," she said.

"We don't have Depends®; we're making some. We run out of IV tubing; we put two secondaries together. It was a lot of putting our heads together to give the patient what they needed," Blackdeer said. "I was calling it MacGyvering nursing because that's how I felt sometimes."

The hardest part? "At some point, I was taking care of patients I knew were not going to survive, and decisions had to be made about who could be saved," she said. "I don't think that was explained too much to patients. However, we as nurses knew. That was hard."

But even in the darkest times, there were bright spots. Such as "family dinners" with her peers back at their hotel, sharing their wins and losses from the day. Bike rides through the city on days off.

Blackdeer learned a lot about limits too—and pushing past hers. "Even though I came home and sat in my shower in my hotel sometimes and just cried," she said she came to expect herself to persevere.

She formed a rare kind of bond with her fellow providers as they banded together to battle through what likely will be the biggest challenge they face as medical professionals.



And lives were saved — including Maria's. When Rosa asked her patient if she'd remembered their conversations, Maria replied, "Yes, and thank you for not listening."

"That will be an impact I forever will remember," Blackdeer said.

