

Frontline Worker Hero Pay

Testimony from The Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society

Hello, my name is Kim Stoltzman. I'm the Director of Nursing at the Good Samaritan Society - New Hope location. I know that I probably speak for all long-term care workers when I say that I care for, think of, and love my residents as if they were my own family. That has only been enhanced during the pandemic.

Like so many of you, my life has changed. Until I was fortunate enough to receive the vaccine, my life consisted of going to work and going straight home. As I reflect on the past 18 months since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, my initial thoughts immediately go to our residents and our health care workers.

Many long-term care staff stepped up to the plate to either take care of residents or test residents for COVID as we began to see cases climb not only across Minnesota, but across all our facilities in the U.S.

These long-term care workers are truly heroes:

- While focusing on providing the best care to our residents during the height of the pandemic, many of us had to sacrifice our own personal lives. We were still mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, sisters, brothers. We were dealing with additional challenges – many of us had children who were at home doing distance learning, or their spouse lost their job, or they had a loved one who needed extra help ... the uncertainty was not only inside the clinical setting, it was also waiting at home for us and that created an additional layer of stress.
 - I know many made arrangements to stay at hotels or stay with co-workers who were working with them in the same long-term care facilities, while others implemented measures of social distancing and masking with in our own households to ensure we didn't bring the virus home to their families and children. There was so much fear of the unknown
 - In long-term care, we faced ongoing staffing challenges during the pandemic – which often meant that for those of us who continued working, we spent the past 18 months picking up extra shifts to take care of our residents in their greatest time of need. There were days
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where more than 50% of our staff were out due to exposures or symptoms but those of us that did come to work knew we had an calling to fulfill and all stepped up to do what was necessary to ensure those we cared for received the necessary care, services and love they needed and deserved.

- For many of us, there was no question whether or not we were willing to step up to the plate and even risk our health to care for our residents – while also balancing our other responsibilities as parents or caregivers at home.

It was extremely heartbreaking to see several of our residents' health deteriorate rapidly as COVID took over their body. Due to our visitor restrictions, many of these residents didn't have a family member or loved one beside them during their final moments.

As health care workers, we did everything we could to fill that void. We had staff that would sit at the residents side while on the phone with the family convey final words to their loved one as the family stood outside the window looking in at their dying loved one.

We spent several hours at the bedside with our residents, many who we knew so well and considered family. These residents were scared, we were scared, especially those first several months when the virus was still new and unpredictable. At the end of the day, many of our frontline health care workers said, "this is what I was called to do. I am a health care worker, and I was called to take care of people."

In nursing homes across the nation, we've seen the tragic impact of COVID-19. The vaccine is a huge milestone in the fight against this virus. The vaccine will help keep residents and staff safe. But it's going to take all of us getting the vaccine.

Things have gotten much better since the vaccine has become widely available. But we still continue to wear layers upon layers of personal protective equipment. Although a majority of our residents are vaccinated, we continue to do everything we can to keep them safe and out of harm's way. The experiences and memories that many long-term care workers have from the past 18 months, will stick with us for the rest of our lives

These men and women are truly heroes. They helped our moms, dads and grandparents during their greatest time of need – both physically and emotionally. Many of these brave health care workers risked their own lives for the safety and comfort of our residents.

They are health care heroes.

