

Dear Pre-Pandemic Me



March 20 marks two years since the first confirmed COVID-19 case at Southcoast Health. As we reflect on more than two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are embracing a process of healing and growth – healing from the loss and trauma and growing from our triumphs and lessons along the way.

As part of our commitment to honor and heal our Southcoast Health community, we asked employees to take a moment to write a letter to the person they were before the COVID-19 pandemic.

These letters are from nurses, providers and staff – both on the frontlines and behind the scenes, everybody and anybody who was behind a mask or covered in PPE, sacrificing their all for the COVID-19 pandemic. These letters are real and raw. They are true accounts and reflections from people who continue to fight this deadly virus. Due to the emotional intensity and sensitivity of the subject matter, we have deidentified all letters.

We wanted to hear from the frontline healthcare heroes, and we hope their messages mean as much to you as they do to us.

They said, **Dear Pre-Pandemic Me:**

“Go see your Mum.”

Did you forget to understand that your whole world can change in a minute? Put down your cell phone, only pick it up to text someone that you love them and plan to meet them IN PERSON before that's no longer an option. Go see your Mum, something may keep you from entering the doors of the nursing home. TRAVEL! NOW!

“Time is fleeting, and it is up to me to ensure that I cherish every single moment.”

Just remember that you are not alone. That you are stronger than you think and braver than you feel. These next two years are going to challenge you in every way, shape, and form, but you will come out the other side a different person. A person who understands the value of personal connection and human kinship. A person who no longer takes for granted the time that she has with those around her. A person who truly acknowledges that time is fleeting, and it is up to me to ensure that I cherish every single moment as it comes, one by one. Remember to keep moving forward, one foot in front of the other, and know, it will all be okay.

“Wear lipstick.”

Say yes to invitations. Hug loved ones. Visit those who can't get out. Meet friends for coffee. Wear lipstick. Show your face & smile, be thankful for your freedoms, be grateful and gracious to those who work hard to keep us safe and make life worth living.

“Be compassionate, strong, and resilient in the face of crisis.”

These last two years have been surreal. You would never understand what we have experienced, the devastating losses and witnessing the catastrophic impact on the entire world. You truly took vaccines for granted. They were just part of growing up and a rite of passage at annual check-ups. You would now have greater appreciation for science and a much deeper understanding of why people choose healthcare as a profession. We have seen staff on the frontline giving so much of themselves personally and risking exposure to them and their families. You would honor health care workers for their service, their sacrifices and learn what it means to be compassionate, strong, and resilient in the face of crisis. You would be proud to be a part of this incredible team. You would be even more impressed with what they did and continue to do every day.



“Give yourself grace, give yourself love, and give yourself time to heal.”

So much has changed since we last spoke. It seems like the world is a much stranger, darker and scarier place than we knew it to be in the years passed. Time moves slower and quicker at the same time, and I'm just not sure if that is a good or a bad thing. And it seems like no matter how much effort we put in, the results come out the same. It has been exhausting, discouraging and just overall draining in this constant fight to cure what seems to be, the incurable. But this is not something we can turn our backs to. We cannot and will not let up in our efforts to do what is our "calling"; to care for those who are in their most vulnerable states, to give a compassionate touch to those of whom have been isolated from human interaction, and to serve as a loving guide to those on their way to their eternal resting place. It has been a long two years, filled with many different emotions and experiences that will never leave my mind for as long as I may live. But one thing I hope to always keep with me is the desire to be the best nurse I can be. So, pre-pandemic Me, even though you never knew what was to lie ahead of you, just know that you have already made a difference. Give yourself grace, give yourself love, and give yourself time to heal.

“Keep faith.”

You are about to face a world you never knew could exist. Although things will be scary and you won't know how to feel or what to believe, keep faith. Let go of burdens you cannot control. Enjoy this time spent at home, before you know it things will get back to normal little by little and you will miss having nothing to do.



“Treat others as you would want to be treated.”

Remember, be patient, take other's feelings into consideration more often, and treat others as you would want to be treated. This is not just about you or your family, consider the world and people around you, and do your best to prevent anyone else's suffering.



“There is a light at the end of the tunnel; keep striving to reach it.”

Be ready...you are about to embark on a period of your life different from anything you have yet experienced.

Be careful when digesting information...check sources, believe science. Do not engage in debates with others who do not have open minds, you may jeopardize relationships if you try.

Respect healthcare workers. They will be working hard, in uncomfortable PPE, wondering if they will be infected with this virus...if they will bring it to their loved ones...if they will survive this pandemic. They will watch people die alone, unable to take comfort in the presence of family or friends, they will be operating out of an amazing sense of duty and compassion while sacrificing their own safety.

Your personal life will be affected. You will be furloughed from your job without knowing if or when you will return. Use your free time wisely; enjoy the outdoors; go for walks, bike rides, drives. Have picnic lunches. Organize your living space, redecorate. Make your outdoor space appealing - you'll be spending a lot of time there. Develop a list of things you would like to accomplish; find new projects; become creative; remember to exercise; take care of yourself.

Utilize delivery services and support small businesses whenever possible as they will suffer greatly. Stay in touch with family and friends through telephone, social media, etc. Many people will deal with depression and loneliness. Keep yourself healthy and try to help others to do the same.

Find the good things; watch people connect in ways like never before-singing from balconies, having virtual dance parties, posting encouraging signs and artwork on lawns, windows, porches and street corners.

Remain vigilant. Don't take your health for granted. Things will begin to look up, and then new complications and other issues will emerge. When you return to work, be accepting of changes and new ways of doing things. Take advantage of opportunities that may arise, but be careful not to burn bridges.

Use this opportunity to grow. Make the best of things, stay positive. There is a light at the end of the tunnel; keep striving to reach it.



“What is truly important in life (is) spending time with those that matter most.”

The past two years have been a major reflection on life as a whole. I have grown in ways that I never knew could happen so quickly. The pandemic we all faced has made me realize what is truly important in life, spending time with those that matter most and are dear to my heart. More appreciation of the simple things in life. No longer putting things off that I know I want to accomplish. Taking that flight, booking that vacation, experiencing things that we all tend to say to ourselves, someday. What if someday never comes? The time to enjoy life is right now. Express your feeling to people you love and care about and make sure they know how you feel. I have become more empathetic and understanding to others’ situations. It's ok someone is having a bad day, try and be a light for them. Show kindness to everyone you cross paths with because you never know what someone else could be dealing with or going through and your simple act of kindness could make a world of difference to that person. The pandemic has helped me grow as a human being in many positive ways. I can't end this letter without thanking all the frontline workers for their courageousness throughout all of this, without them, we wouldn't be where we are today. With an abundance of sincerity, Thank You!

“Find joy in our children and grandchildren.”

I couldn't have predicted the changes in our life caused by COVID-19. Many of us contracted COVID, some worse than others, and we lost our father-in-law. Through it all, we tried to be grateful to still be alive and find joy in our children and grandchildren. We look forward to the day when we have conquered this disease.

“You will learn and grow from this.”

You will survive and endure. Some shifts you may feel like quitting, but do not because you have faith that this will pass. You will learn and grow from this. Lean on your team/family when you need help. Help others when you can. I don't know if we have come to the end of the pandemic or not, but the world of healthcare is forever changed.



“Among this chaos, there is beauty. There is kindness. There is compassion.”

Thicken your skin. Harden your shell. What lies ahead of you is the likes of which you have never, and hopefully WILL never experience again. Brace yourself for 60-hour work weeks (minimum), and complete loss of work and home life balance. Your phone will ring at all hours, seven days a week. You will experience physical, mental and emotional exhaustion like never before. You will be at the receiving end of sheer fear, frustration, devastation, misdirected anger, and you will witness a side of people you really wish you hadn't. But don't let yourself get lost in the turmoil. Because among this chaos, there is beauty. There is kindness. There is compassion. It's often buried, but it's there. Remember that childhood lesson from Mr. Rogers. "Look for the helpers." Look hard until you find them. In the beginning, they will be everywhere. There will be great displays of support and recognition, admiration, and community advocacy for what you are doing. As time goes on, it will be much harder to see, and you'll be sure it's completely gone. The compassion will have worn thin and all of a sudden the lawn signs and parades will be just a memory. But what you take away from all of this will be the true test of your strength. So many days you will want to throw in the towel and walk away, and you'll cry driving home at night because you'll know that you can't get a break from it at home either – but, somehow you'll remain on course. You'll hang in there. You'll come back the next day. You will persevere day after day and refuse to give in. You will climb every mountain and jump every hurdle thrown at you. You will marvel at how you got through it and not be entirely sure the scars will ever really heal. But they are your battle scars. And you earned every one of them. Be proud.

“You will be stronger and more resilient than you ever thought you could be.”

Dear Adventurous and Carefree Me,

You are about to have a change of life in every way that you have ever known possible. Buckle up, sweetie. You do not know this yet, but the fun weekends with family and friends are going to end, along with attending anything important like funerals or weddings and your freedoms will be taken away due to fear of the unknown in the COVID-19 pandemic. Prepare yourself for the unknowns, the fears and sacrifices. In the distant future, when this is all over, you will be a different person than you were before March 2020, but you will be stronger and more resilient than you ever thought you could be. You will have learned so much about the immune system and how it functions! Great friendships will be formed and a sense of comradery. Before March 2020, you were you and now you're a new you. You will be okay and say one day...we made it!

Love, Me

Dear Pre-Pandemic Me



"If only I could have prepared you for what was to come."

If only I could have prepared you for what was to come. If only you knew when you graduated nursing school that in your lifetime, such a tragedy would ensue. I long for the person who was looking forward to welcoming my second child into a hands-on, interactive family. I long for the person who was happy about life and truly experiencing the joy in the moment. That person was coming off the adrenaline of a great family vacation, of recently finding out they were pregnant again, when COVID-19 hit. It changed everything. I became a ball of anxiety trying to navigate pregnancy in the pandemic while honoring the oath I promised to uphold as a nurse. I became isolated- no extended family, doctor's appointments and ultrasounds by myself. I became schoolteacher to my daughter while also navigating her stress from not understanding what was happening. All of this on top of the amount of deaths of patients from COVID-19. My newborn didn't meet family for months. It was devastatingly sad, and it changed me. Flash forward to now, the new me, coming off the last omicron surge and it seeming that the COVID pandemic is rapidly becoming hindsight. I hope I can find the old me again. I am burnt out, anxious all the time- about life, and social settings, and working in a profession that has completely changed. There is a plethora of burnt out nurses, understaffing is the normal, and there is such lack of appreciation from families and the general public for all we have had to endure. I am angry at the people who don't understand what healthcare has sustained. It was a natural disaster in a different form. Hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards- they all come with some form of aid, clean up and healing. It is time for my healing. I can only think of the song by Sara Bareilles, "She Used to Be Mine," when reminiscing about the person I used to know, except my catastrophic event was a virulent virus that destroyed mostly everything in its path.

"Zoom....ugh."

Hey self,

Two years ago you had no clue what was about to happen. Every day brought fear of the unknown. Sorrow at the many deaths. Isolation from friends and loved ones. Zoom....ugh. Celebration, some major milestones, like graduations, postponed or gone forever. There were many sad times. Certainly.

But you also learned patience and kindness and what is really meaningful in this short life on this earth. More living in the present and appreciation for all the little beautiful things. To live each day as a blessing because none of us truly know when those lovely days will run out. Be happy. Rejoice in weathering the storm and knowing you have become stronger and wiser.

Yours truly

Dear Pre-Pandemic Me





“Keep moving forward.”

The nursing you have known is about to change. The confidence you have in yourself, in your skills, will be shaken. It will be overtaken by fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear for your safety.

Fear for your family’s safety. Things you once took for granted, a gentle touch, smiling at coworkers, an embrace for grief stricken family members will be replaced by glass barriers, veiled faces, and white plastic jumpsuits. It will seem, for a while, that your compassion has morphed into futility and your ardor has become anxiety. You are about to sink and no matter how much you kick it will feel like you will never get to the surface.

Keep moving forward.

The proverbial Phoenix always rises from the ashes, and you will come out more confident, passionate and stronger than before. You will change. Your co-workers, and really they are so much more than that now, will pull you out of the trenches. Your courage will motivate them, and theirs will uplift you. You will know a level of teamwork that you thought only existed in movies. “Here Comes the Sun,” the sound of hope, will be stuck in your head more than you care to admit. In the end, no matter how helpless the next two years may seem, you will see and truly know that you were made for this.

“I feel more calm around my family and friends since we are vaccinated.”

Before the pandemic, I didn't think anything like this could ever happen to us; put us all in fear for our lives, our family and friends. I was enjoying life to the fullest not having too much to fear for. But then in the heat of the pandemic, I found myself keeping distance from everyone because I was afraid they would get me sick or they were afraid I would get them sick because I work in the healthcare field. Things are getting better now, and I feel more calm around my family and friends since we are vaccinated and taking precautions in public. I just hope, pray and keep faith in my heart that everything will get better and that others will do their part in keeping us safe.



“They will remember how you treated them.”

To the nurse I was before the pandemic, don't forget to take time for yourself. You have put so many patients before you, and you lost the reason why you became a nurse. Try to remember you are doing your best and remember, "they may never remember your name, but they will remember how you treated them." (Maya Angelou)

“Take care of yourself and those around you.”

When the first case of COVID was announced, you thought, "This won't last." You became overwhelmed when the numbers kept climbing due to the uncertainty of how this virus would progress. Then healthcare systems throughout the world became overwhelmed with no medication(s) available to treat patients with the virus. You were lucky to have been in the position to work with a group of providers who did everything they could to protect you, your coworkers, as well as their families, all the while taking care of the sickest of sick patients. No one knew enough about this virus and at the time there were no available vaccines. The providers took the time to read every article available hoping to absorb as much information as possible on the virus to help others. I hope you realize how lucky you were to be in the position of receiving support from those around you.

You spent many years believing those you love would be around forever. If there is one thing that you have learned through the past few years, it is that time is precious. You need to let those you love know how much they mean to you more often.

Your new perspective on life will be less about material wants and more about the connections with family, friends and coworkers.

Wearing a mask while being vaccinated may seem unnecessary at times, but even the vaccinated are still getting the virus. You need to continue to be conscious of masking not only for yourself, but for those around you.

As you move into the "NEW NORMAL" never forget where you were in March 2020 and where you are in March 2022. "ALIVE" "LUCKY" and most of all "GRATEFUL."

Take care of yourself and those around you. Reach out every day to someone you know and let them know how much having them in your life means to you. Be grateful you are here to write this letter.

Again, take care of yourself.

Dear Pre-Pandemic Me



“Let it go with the grace that washes through your days.”

Let go of the way you thought the next year would unfold. The holding of plans or dreams. There will be a time soon when everything you know comes to a halt. Work will be harder because it will be full of fear. All social engagements will be on indefinite pause. Make sure all your flights are refundable. Download zoom and find the place of rest to read a book for once since you won't be traveling for a while. Feel disappointed because of missed weddings and the fact that your dad won't be able to get into that lifesaving clinical trial because it is cancelled. Then let it go with the grace that washes through your days.

“As caregivers we soon learned how much we missed the touch of a human hand.”

This time in 2020 was a time of the unknown. The virus was deadly and not much was known about a remedy since there was no vaccine available. Within a few short weeks, we were all affected - people lost employment, the government shutdown took effect, virtual learning and provider TeleVisits became a reality. We became well versed in how to take care of our patients via video. Patients' warming reactions to seeing their providers on video was encouraging. That being said, as caregivers we soon learned how much we missed the touch of a human hand. My deepest appreciation for the frontline workers. You guys rock.

“They persevered.”

Wow! The past two years have changed your life in so many ways. You have never been so worried about the health and safety of your family, friends, your staff, and your colleagues, as you have been throughout the past two years. The thought of the possibility of dying from a virus crossed your mind more than once, which is something you would have never even considered in the past. You knew a lot about infection control, PPE and handwashing, but you are an expert now! Previously, it was just infection control; now, not washing your hands correctly could land you in the hospital, or even worse....on a ventilator!

You saw your staff step up and do the hardest work they've ever done. Caring for patients in their home with COVID is risky, but they persevered. Donning all that extra equipment in the summer heat was very difficult, but they pushed through it and got the job done. Your staff are an amazing group of professionals, and I know you are so proud of them! What an honor it must be for you to work with them every day!

We are all hoping the worst is over. I know you've been praying that people will continue to get vaccinated and boosted and our lives will get back to our old normal. Hang in there!





“Hoping your plans and dreams come true.”

So many plans coming up in the next year or two for you. Know you're so excited about seeing your 3-year-old granddaughter and son in CA. Going to every Pats game. Been doing this 40 years! Milestone birthday on 2/26/21. Where did 65 years go? Hoping your plans and dreams come true. Most of all wishing you the best of health.

“This is the reason you are here.”

I know you are a "people person," but before you know it you will be robbed of simple pleasures that personalize the art of nursing. You will be forced to omit a hug prior to discharging a patient who has overcome their illness or braved the required treatments. There will be no high fiving the kids when they are brave enough to have a vaccine or sit through an assessment. There will be a face shield, gloves, masks, and gowns making you look alien like to the babies who touch your cold scale, often provoking a cry, as they are unable to see you smile behind your mask.

This will be the new normal, alterations to assessments, which once felt personal, have made nursing feel more cold. Keep your heart and voice gentle, send extra text messages to your patients, specifically those higher risk of being ill. Check on them the way you would check on your family. This will bring the warmth, the love, and the heart to nursing. This is the reason you are here. This will give you purpose through the pandemic.



“Most of all TOILET PAPER.”

You are in for a bumpy ride ahead. The next two years may be challenging. You will need to be prepared and cautious. Times may get rough, but just know it WILL get better, Be STRONG and PATIENT. We will all get through this if we work together. Say some prayers and have positive thoughts. Just an FYI - you will need to stock up on some sanitizer, masks and most of all TOILET PAPER.

Just remember it WILL get better.

“You truly are healthcare heroes.”

Dear Pre-Pandemic Lab Family,

Looking back now, it’s hard to believe what our perception of a busy day was and the limits we could tolerate. As the wave of the pandemic approached, we could only hope that the initiatives to stop the spread would keep the deadly virus at bay, but the storm was inevitable and darkness was upon us.

We had no in hospital testing capabilities for the virus. We scrambled to find alternatives.

Reference lab testing came with long turnaround times and was inadequate to help us manage our patients. As we struggled to find testing platforms, the virus spread rapidly and we quickly found our hospital system stressed to the limits.

Cases, hospitalizations, and death counts rose quickly. Infection Prevention guidance was constantly changing as we found out more about the virus. We faced a shortage of personal protective equipment. Substitutions and reuse were necessary. Many of our staff fell ill and were restricted from work. The others were left to do their best to care for our patients with minimal staffing support. We were working long hours. It was difficult not to feel defeated.

The hospitals and our labs quickly became overwhelmed. We were screened for symptoms before entry to the buildings. Facemasks became part of our routine wardrobe. Services were closed and visitors were restricted. The hallways were empty. Our nursing staff became the patients’ family, being there through their illness and sadly, being the last person for some as they passed. My heart sank when we were asked to look for a refrigerator truck in case the morgue reached capacity.



Many feared that they may become infected and pass the virus on to loved ones. Society changed. Non-essential businesses closed, people were asked to stay at home. Celebrations were canceled. Drive by parades, waving through windows, on-line meetings and phones were used to stay in touch with colleagues and loved ones. It was an emotional roller coaster.

We were able to implement testing under the Emergency Use Authorization act. However, analyzers and supplies were difficult if not impossible to obtain. The demand overwhelmed the supply as healthcare facilities across the country tried to manage the virus.

Through all of this, our lab stood strong. It was all hands on deck to fulfill the testing needs of our hospitals and community. We contributed to an enormous effort to implement new and improved testing that helped us provide accurate and timely results. This allowed the organization to improve bed flow and institute appropriate control measures to protect our patients, staff, and community.

We worked closely with our nursing colleagues to quickly open a drive through testing site at our surgi-center, which then transitioned to tents then trailers in our hospital parking lots and we collaborated with multiple departments across the organization to set up a lab at the field hospital at UMass Dartmouth Gym. Thankfully, we did not have to use it.

Now, as we slowly emerge from the darkness of the pandemic and the light begins to shine, we can return to some sense of normalcy, although not unaffected. Our lives have been changed forever. We lost loved ones and friends and will never forget what we have been through.

Know that you will face every challenge and accomplish more than you could ever imagine. You will go on even when you think you cannot. Your contribution will make a difference and will touch many lives. You truly are healthcare heroes.





The COVID-19 pandemic was and is a crisis unprecedented in its size and scope.

It will take time to heal, grow and move toward a COVID-free world. Through the turmoil we've experienced together, we've learned how to find light in the darkness. To focus on what matters most. To care for ourselves and others. To live for today.

At the very least, it has increased clarity about what community really is.

