

a letter to my closest loss

your wife was quiet as i cleaned her arm
she held her breath for the jab
air left her body as instructions entered
0.3mL of clear fluid
hope

congratulations met gratitude as tears welled in her eyes
my husband's in the hospital she whispered
put on a ventilator yesterday
tears welled in mine

she asked me to pray for you

twenty one days passed

i approached the next car and
saw your wife
unexpected
a pleasant surprise

i greeted her enthusiastically and
asked about you
she broke down and
cried

he died

i was stunned
helpless
our eyes welled once again
then overflowed

i crawled into the car and
gave your wife a hug
instinctually
immediately

grief like COVID spreads too
expansively
without vaccines in development
for which isolation will not protect

i joined your wife in her mourning
but could not relieve her pain
sharing did not diminish
i'd be an analgesic if i could

This piece captures two interactions I had with an individual in an outdoor parking garage-turned-vaccine clinic. The middle-aged patient drove hours from the east side of the state to receive a COVID vaccine. Aspects of this story are tragic, historic and shared by the loved ones of over 500,000 in this country alone. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that taking the time to connect with patients as humans and sharing emotions will make me a more impactful physician than compartmentalizing and saving time. As a physician, I hope to remember these lessons, learning to ascertain the values of my patients, then remember and honor them. I anticipate this will demand courage and humility, yet having witnessed a potential outcome, I believe it is worth it.