

Welcome to Christmas at the Ledge! Thank you to Jen, Melanie and her Mom, Sabrina and all who have baked for us today. Special thanks to my dear friend, Mary and Jen for helping Santa organize all the gifts he has brought for our kids. And a HUGE round of applause to SANTA himself who reliably informed me that NO ONE cancels Christmas!

My speech today was sent to us from another brave healthcare professional, a paramedic here in Edmonton. Thank you for listening.

As a current front-line paramedic with AHS, I have had the privilege of working for over 30 years in EMS. I love my job; every day I have an opportunity for positive impact in the lives of others!

What I am about to tell you is shared wholeheartedly by other colleagues.

The truth is that life is precious.

We all eventually come to the same end; and sometimes are unable to see death coming. We see many taken before their time; a life cut short in the middle of living. If we focus just on this possibility, we begin to hinder our living. When we make decisions based on the fear of death, it causes us to forget that we were created to really live! Taken to the extreme, we call this a "phobia" and we give these people psychiatric care.

Yet, this same fear has been nurtured in our current society since we first heard of Covid19. As a paramedic, I am witnessing first-hand the damage that it is causing in our population. I am greatly saddened to watch the fallout of our current lockdowns and mandatory masking:

- Cardiac arrest rates are up

- Suicide rates are up
- Overdoses are even more common
- Depression and anxiety are rampant
- A greater number of assaults are happening within family units
- Many people with medical issues who should have been dealt with months ago, are suffering from the consequences of delayed medical diagnosis and treatment
- Those who use exercise and entertainment as a form of detoxing and destressing, are now forced to find other outlets – many of which are toxic
- Our senior population is suffering mentally, emotionally and physically from lockdowns that have stolen their freedom to join society, their physical mobility and their mental stimulation. I have personally been told on multiple occasions that it would “be better to die than to live like this”.

As a paramedic, we are trained critical thinkers. I am just as likely to be on my knees in a ditch attempting to pull someone from an overturned vehicle as delivering a baby or trying to extricate someone from a PTO (power take off) who has trapped their arm. I see that as one of the great things about my job; I have no idea what my day will bring or what I will be challenged to accomplish. We seamlessly work with our counterparts in fire and police to manage and mitigate every situation. We are constantly assessing and then reassessing our situation, because we are working in a constantly changing environment that causes us to adapt and adjust frequently.

Contrast that with the OR Theatre. We rotate through OR to practice intubating patients (putting tubes in their throats to breathe). In OR everything about the environment is controlled; from who has access down to the very air they breathe. A very stringent procedure of washing and

donning is in place to ensure sterility of their environment to the best of their ability. It is impressive to watch their well-rehearsed roles and duties.

Now, though, as paramedics, we are expected to wear gowns and masks on every call. This is on top of the safety glasses, and gloves that we have been wearing since I started. We have been trained and re-trained in very specific donning and doffing procedures that we are told will slow transmission rates. We are expected to use hand sanitizer repeatedly throughout the doffing process. Now when we show up at a critical call where life hangs in the balance, we are taking longer to intervene because of the time it takes to don our PPE – on occasion family or friends are yelling at us because we are taking so long to arrive at the patient's side (which I fully understand).

I am frequently witnessing the negative effects of the continuous masking that we are mandated to maintain at work. I find myself getting short of breath at times, especially when performing physical tasks such as CPR, carrying patients downstairs, etc. The second very negative problem with masking is that it impedes my effective communication with my patients – even more dramatically with the young and the old. My job involves a significant amount of trust in me from my patient. We are all trained at using visual clues to establish that trust – and a smile goes a long way! The elderly often become adept at lip reading as their hearing declines, and a mask removes that adaptation entirely. Children are adept at reading facial expression and often will not readily develop a relationship with someone they cannot fully see. Younger children are often scared of those wearing masks. When you add that to an emergent situation, it creates an added degree of difficulty and stress to both parties.

While I absolutely am invested in slowing the rate of transmission to the vulnerable populations as much as anyone; if all of the PPE we are using is effective in the way it is intended, why is transmission still occurring? Most

surgeons give prophylactic antibiotics prior to and after surgery, because even in their controlled environment – infections happen. Every time I go into any ER, into any senior long term care facility, into any medical clinic – I see gowned and masked and gloved individuals. I have not seen a single person in a grocery store or mall not wearing a mask in months. Are we truly all so inept in our practices? NO! All of these things neglect to respect the fact that viruses are microscopic; so tiny in fact that they pass through masks and gowns and occasionally gloves!

If we could see the world around us, we would see we are surrounded by microscopic bacteria and viruses – in the air we breathe, on every surface (yes, even the one you just sanitized!). But the better news is that your body has been dealing with viruses and bacteria since before you were born and is usually well equipped to handle them.

Your body has pounds (yes, actually pounds!) of bacteria in it at all times – it's called your microbiome. Your 'good' bacteria are constantly at war keeping your 'bad' bacteria at bay! If you are doing the things you know are good for you (eating well, sleeping, hydrating, loving others), your immune system will be able to handle this virus as well as most others. In the field, this virus exhibits symptoms exactly like the regular flu; we are entirely unable to tell the difference. Our bodies have come in contact with the other covid viruses from previous years and the state of your immune system will determine the severity and extent of your symptoms.

On an ongoing basis, I am tasked with going into long term care facilities that are on covid lockdown (have a large number of confirmed cases). Why don't I hesitate and shiver in fear as I walk down the halls? Because I take care of myself and do the things I know support my immune system. I make sure I have optimal Vitamin D, Omega 3, Vitamin B12 and magnesium levels. I exercise and stay away from sugar, especially high fructose corn syrup. I

take time to connect with and support friends, family and neighbors. I work on my mental health by meditation and deepening my faith.

I understand that I come in contact with viruses and bacteria on a daily basis; whether I am at work or not. I suspect I have come into close contact with the covid virus many times already – especially before it became a big panic and we increased our PPE. I hate to be the bearer of bad news for some, but you can follow all the current guidelines and be a fastidious cleaner and applier of hand sanitizer and you will still come in contact with the covid virus. Many of you have already come in contact with it and your immune system fought it off handily – you had no symptoms but have already beat the big bad covid! Another important fact is that this virus, like every other virus, will never leave us. Remember when this all started and we were told to isolate to flatten the curve? The curve was flattened not by us shutting down our world but by the fact that most healthy people are able to handle this virus without any doctor or hospital intervention. You may come in contact with this virus multiple times a year for the rest of your life; once again, a healthy immune system and body is the key to this and all viruses.

Many are heralding the upcoming vaccine, but it entirely bypassed the phase one and two animal testing – during which time they usually discover many of the side effects. Phase one and two human testing was combined – again subverting the safety protocols. Because the government indemnifies vaccine producers against litigation, those with negative outcomes will be left without recourse. In anyone under 65, your own immune system is your best defense against any virus.

The best advice that I could give you is do not be afraid. Be informed and proactive in your own health and in the health of those you love. We are all given one life. Live it to the full.