

The Coronavirus has uprooted millions of Americans lives. From the beginning of March, to now December, we have all missed out on so many opportunities, experiences, and major life events. We know one day the virus will be well managed through herd immunity and the help of vaccines, and our lives will be able to continue just as we left off. But what about those who may not live to see that day? What about those elderly people who are living the rest of their days in an assisted living or nursing home with no relief in sight?

My parents are just two of the thousands, if not millions of Americans who may never get to see a sense of normalcy return, let alone be able to advocate for themselves inside their facility. My father, who is 89 years old, is a proud Navy Veteran who served honorably in the Korean war. He is proud of his service but even more proud to be married to his beautiful wife, for almost 69 years. Although my parents reside under the same roof, they do not live together. My mother is an 87-year-old dementia patient who lives in the memory care ward, and my father, except for macular degeneration is on the assisted living side and can still manage everyday living tasks.

Twice my parents have been quarantined to their rooms, once for a 3rd shift worker who tested positive and again when a resident who went to the hospital for surgery and returned with the virus. No one else has contracted the virus or passed from it in their facility. My father is locked down in his 15 X 15 room and my mother to her 12 X 12 room. Meals are brought to them and they are not allowed to leave their rooms under any circumstance. This last quarantine lasted eleven days! Yes, eleven days to get results. Funny, but OSU randomly tests their “virtual students” and my daughter was tested last week with her results in less than 24 hours!! Just imagine how my Dad feels. He wants so badly to get to mom and attend to her. And Mom, well she barely understands life as it is, I imagine she is frightened. Prior to Covid we were worried about mom’s care, now with no one going into the facility, I wonder about what her care even entails. If she is quarantined to her room, most likely that means she is left in her bed. She needs to see my Dad every day and a family member. She does respond to our voices.

Human beings are not designed to live alone. We’re meant to be in company with one another. This use of a lockdown is unprecedented, lockdowns have never been tried as a method of disease control. And these lockdowns can and will have deadly effects on the elderly in a nursing home or assisted living facility. They should be able to see family members and use precautions. Loneliness is already a common problem in long term care institutions, having many toxic consequences. Depression being at the top of that list. But also, loneliness is a risk factor for cognitive decline and progression of Alzheimer or dementia patients

My mother’s hospice care nurse has been denied entrance into the facility and to see her during this last lockdown. I believe that we should be adopting measures to protect the vulnerable, that should be the central aim of health responses. Therefore, the homes should use staff with acquired immunity and perform frequent testing of other staff and VISITORS. Yes, I believe that my parents and all residents should have visitors. The last time my parents saw family was on my birthday October 28. Just a few short days later the governor closed the homes again. They need to see us and our smiles to feel our love, so they have a goal and purpose to keep alive and maintain their sanity. At least one person should be designated as someone who can come into a home and see their family member.

Our strategy should be not to let people die, but to protect people who are vulnerable, and by protecting them we need to see them, and love them. I am writing to you to voice my frustration about watching my parents and other residents suffer. And I literally am watching through their windows. These people cannot be their own advocate, so I am advocating for them because in my perspective they are being mentally and physically neglected.

Susie Strauss