

cuts through your skin and you can't wait to take it off and finally breathe. Breathe. It's what we all want these days, doctors and patients, nurses and care workers. All of us. We want air.

Finally, the end of your shift comes, 8 hours made even longer and more endless by thirst, hunger, and the need to relieve yourself, things you cannot do when you're on duty: drinking, eating, or going to the bathroom would mean taking off the protective equipment. Too risky. And too expensive. Protective equipment is precious, and taking it off means having to replace some of it, reducing the quantity available to your colleagues. You have to be thrifty, you have to resist and wear a diaper you hope you won't have to use because your dignity and your psychological state are compromised enough as it is by the work you are doing, the look on the patients' faces, the words of their relatives when you call them to update them on the condition of their loved ones. Some ask you

to wish their father a happy name day, others to tell their mother they love her and to give her a caress . . . and you do what they ask, trying to hide from your colleagues the tears in your eyes.

The end of the shift comes, reinforcements arrive, other colleagues take over. You give them instructions, the things to do, the things not to do. You can go home, but first you have to take off your protections, and you must be careful — careful with every move you make. Removing protective equipment is another ritual that must be performed calmly, because everything you are wearing is contaminated and must not come in contact with your skin.

You are tired and you just want to get away, but you must make one last effort, concentrate on each movement you make to remove all the protections. Each movement has to be slow. You can finally take off the mask, and when you peel it off, you feel a searing pain from the bleeding cuts that it made in your nose.

The tape was useless — it didn't stop your nose from bleeding or hurting. But at least you're free. You leave the undressing area naked, put on uniform scrubs, and go to the changing rooms.

You get dressed, leave the hospital, and take a deep breath. Get in the car. When you get home you have to be watchful again. The entryway is already organized like the hospital undressing area because you cannot risk contaminating the house. You undress, put everything in a bag, and quickly take a hot shower: the virus can survive on your hair, so you have to wash yourself thoroughly.

It's over. The shift is over, the fight has just begun.

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From the Center for Cardiac Arrhythmias of Genetic Origin, IRCCS Istituto Auxologico Italiano, Milan.

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