

Helpless

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A REFLECTION of the overwhelming struggle experienced by a hospice and palliative medicine physician during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I feel so helpless...

The POWERFUL TOOLS I once wielded strongly, artfully, and skillfully to positively impact the lives of many are now FORBIDDEN to use...

They have become DANGEROUS WEAPONS that COULD NOW CAUSE DEATH. HOLDING A HAND was once a firm, strong, and powerful way to deliver with conviction that one is not alone... COULD NOW CAUSE DEATH.

SQUEEZING A SHOULDER was once a comforting, reassuring, guiding, and supportive way to convey that one knows they are understood... COULD NOW CAUSE DEATH.

PROVIDING A SHOULDER TO CRY ON was once a way to provide release and relief from the heavy burdens of illness, loss, and grief... COULD NOW CAUSE DEATH.

EMBRACING ONE IN A WARM ENVELOPING HUG was once used to improve pain, decrease anxiety, provide

hope and camaraderie, rejuvenate the spirit, and replenish the soul... COULD NOW CAUSE DEATH.

I am left with only WORDS.

WORDS that are the only connection as families and friends are isolated from each other.

WORDS muffled behind the impersonal mask that is our armor yet renders us all strangers.

WORDS that echo emptily over the crackling static on cell phones.

WORDS that are barely heard over the hum of the machines breathing life into the isolated and lonely.

WORDS that are said.

WORDS that are heard.

WORDS that are so easily misunderstood.

Was it not also WORDS spoken that told us not to worry—that THIS would NOT become A THING?

Those WORDS HAVE NOW CAUSED DEATH.

I feel so helpless.

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