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Word Count: 1039

College Student Steps Onto Frontlines of COVID-19 Response
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June 24, 2020

Christina Maguire, 20, sits at home in Davis, California. A peaceful morning of knitting and crafting is interrupted suddenly by a call to action. Maguire sets out for Sacramento, donning gloves, gown, and mask in preparation for a day of work as an EMT on the frontlines.

Maguire finished her second year at the University of Denver on Zoom like most students. Determined to directly contribute to the fight against Coronavirus and put her own aspirations of medical work to the test, Maguire set out to join the California Health Corps.

The floor of what was once the home of the Sacramento Kings, the Sleep Train Arena, has been fully transformed into a field hospital for overflow COVID-19 patients. Maguire has been providing immediate care after just receiving her EMT license in December.

“This was definitely a big learning curve. A lot of being an EMT is learning on the job. You never know what you are going to see,” said Maguire.

After her work against Coronavirus, Maguire plans to head back to University of Denver next quarter, where she will continue pursuing her degree in molecular biology with a concentration in cognitive neuroscience and minors in chemistry and psychology.

In the midst of debating medical school and other career choices, Maguire felt that this was an equally intense and inspiring time to get hands on experience as a medical worker.

“They say you ‘treat with diesel.’ You get there, you save the life of the patient, and then you move on,” said Maguire. “We had patients and kept them for weeks, so we actually got to do patient care.”

After experiencing the full scope of patient care hands-on, Maguire said “it made me realize that I can deal with this. It’s surreal.” Now Maguire feels emboldened to fully pursue medical work.

While the state of the nation can make her feel helpless, Maguire has found purpose and fulfillment in actively making change. By working directly in the face of the pandemic, Maguire has reclaimed agency in a time of uncertainty and chaos.

For Maguire, being an EMT has grounded the situation in reality. She worries about the media's presentation of "newsworthy" extremes and statistics. Witnessing real patients recover has greatly uplifted her perspective.

"We talk about it as just numbers. That's someone's mom, someone's grandma. That could easily be someone we know," said Maguire.

Maguire said that the humanization of the pandemic has made the threat feel more real but has also made her more optimistic. People are scared of what they do not understand.

Studying the scientific backing of virus research while witnessing the human effects firsthand has been especially important in balancing Maguire's outlook on the present danger.

"I honestly feel less safe at a grocery store than at work," said Maguire. "As a healthcare provider, if you're not safe, you can't help others."

Maguire is equipped with a full body "bunny suit," shoe coverings, hairnet, properly sealed mask, face shield, and two pairs of gloves. Whether at work or not, she takes every opportunity to use hand sanitizer or wash her hands.

The biggest reserve Maguire has had was the risk she takes quarantining with her parents, Dan and Fran Maguire. The last thing she wants to do is put her own family in harm's way.

When Maguire called into the other room asking whether her parents were worried about her or themselves, a quick and confident "no" from her mother answered back without hesitation.

Like at work, Maguire has her own routine for minimizing the risk at home. After leaving her dedicated work shoes in a plastic bag in her car, Maguire goes around the side entrance of her house, throws her clothes straight into the laundry, and runs to the shower.

While her parents are supportive of her work and understand its importance, Maguire said that friends have expressed concern and coworkers have experienced nervous interactions in public after revealing their EMT background.

However, despite both external and internal doubts, Maguire is determined to do her part in this unprecedented time.

“There are some days when I listen to the news and it’s too much,” said Maguire. “It’s a privilege to be able to turn it off. Just because it doesn’t directly affect you doesn’t mean you shouldn’t care.”

Despite her work fighting COVID-19, Maguire feels torn between her duty as a medical worker and her civic duty in a time of political turmoil.

With the recent surge of Black Lives Matter protests in response to police brutality and systemic racism against Black Americans, Maguire has struggled with her inability to protest due to her direct contact with Coronavirus.

Maguire has had to resist getting desensitised to people in her field who work closely with law enforcement because they have skewed perceptions of criticism of the police force.

Even in medicine, which should serve all, said Maguire, there is much reflection to be done regarding racial prejudice. Maguire has observed that not enough people are aware of the vast inequality of treatment between white and non-white patients.

Maguire pointed out that the same oppressive systems which appear in our legislation and government policy are clearly present within our healthcare system like every system in the nation.

Maguire has recognized that medical work has ties to the police force, so there is a lot of division between those who have the “law and order” mindset and those who just want to help those in need.

Maguire attested that when the subject of racism comes up in the medical field, professionals often say “let’s not talk about it. This doesn’t affect us. Let’s push it under the rug,” instead of actually addressing the issues.

When Maguire is not on the clock, she spends her time trying to stay mentally and physically healthy. Crafting and exercising allow her to be focused and ready for the next alert.

Despite its physical and psychological pressures, Maguire knows now that she can and will pursue medical work. For Maguire, there is such a personally moving responsibility and power in caring for another human.

In a similar way to activism, “you really have to be a medical worker because you want to,” said Maguire. “You can really change someone’s life.”

Sources:

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