

Spotlight

Yale
NewHaven
Health
Yale New Haven
Hospital

Weak, but alive!
Carlos leaves the hospital — thanks to your help — after 50 days fighting COVID-19.

COVID-19 Emergency Issue

Because of you, Carlos survived

In February, Carlos Yanza Salinas, 45, had his annual physical. All the routine tests were normal, and his doctor told him he didn't have a thing to worry about.

JUST A FEW WEEKS LATER, he was on a ventilator, fighting for his life.

When he started feeling sick, Carlos knew it was something different. "It was like nothing I ever had before," he says. "It was the worst ever."

Guessing he might have COVID-19, Carlos got tested. Connie, his wife, cared for him at home, doing her best to isolate him from their four daughters while they waited for the test results.

But his fever remained stubbornly high and he began experiencing hallucinations. After a frightening

night, when Carlos collapsed on the bathroom floor and couldn't get back up, Connie rushed him to the Emergency Department at YNH. She had to leave him at the entrance, because she wasn't allowed inside due to COVID safety restrictions.

Three hours later, Carlos's doctors were preparing to induce a coma and place him on a ventilator. Carlos sent Connie one last photo, showing himself hooked up to supplemental oxygen.

That was the last she heard from him for more than four weeks.

(continued inside) 

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“I’m a different person now. Before, I was so committed to work that family always came after. Now, I put the family first.”

CARLOS YANZA SALINAS



Carlos, at home with his wife, Connie. **Donors, your generosity helped save him. Thank you!**

For 30 days, his life hung in the balance

When Carlos thinks back to that time, when the ventilator was breathing for him, all he recalls are strange dreams. “I had all these out-of-body experiences,” he says. “I was in a lost city with no people. I dreamed of my family coming in and out. I was always going — like I didn’t want to stay put in one place.”

For Connie and her four daughters, those 30 days were more like a nightmare. She couldn’t see her husband due to COVID visitor restrictions. They waited for a daily call from Carlos’s doctors, hoping and praying for good news.

Carlos got worse before he got better. Connie remembers her daughter’s 19th birthday — April 4 — as one of the worst days. The doctor called to say he wasn’t sure whether Carlos was going to make it.

“It was unbelievable, impossible to describe,” she remembers. “They put the phone to his ear and we all said what we had to say.”

Turning the corner

But Carlos fought hard. And his doctors fought hard for him, too. They tried every promising treatment that emerged in those early days, including administering steroids to combat the infection and “proning” — when a team of caregivers carefully places the patient on his belly to improve oxygenation.

Carlos came off the ventilator after 30 days. He spent another 20 days in the hospital before being discharged to an acute rehab center, where he spent 19 more days.

Finally, after months of longing to hug his wife and daughter, Carlos came home, 71 days after he was first admitted to the hospital. “The day I came home was the happiest day of my life,” Carlos says.

“The amazing doctors and nurses I had at the hospital made all the difference,” he says. “They tried everything new to keep me alive. I will never be through thanking them for their kindness.”

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Report from the front lines: fighting COVID-19 at YNH

“Last January, it was all hypothetical,” remembers Nate Wood, MD, hospital resident. He was midway through his internship in internal medicine at YNH.

“My colleagues and I were hearing about the virus in China and wondering — what if it came here? Would we still go to work, would we quarantine? But as March came closer, we began to realize it wasn’t a matter of *if*, but *when*.”

The ICU was eerily quiet when news of the pandemic first hit. People were scared of the virus, so they stayed away from the hospital. While Nate and the ICU staff waited, they pored over Twitter and read voraciously, trying to learn as much as they could from caregivers in Seattle and Italy, who were already in the thick of it.

For Nate and his colleagues — interns and experienced physicians alike — there was so much that wasn’t known. Most of them had never dealt with a pandemic virus before. How contagious was it? How deadly? Which conditions might combine with it to make it even worse? There were no answers.

The first COVID-19 patient was admitted on March 13 and everything changed after that. “I was definitely scared at the beginning,” says Nate. “I knew I might get it — I knew this could be life-threatening. But if you’re able to help a lot of patients along the way, then it’s worth it.”

Still struggling, eight months later

Carlos is back at work, managing the home improvement and remodeling company he and Connie own. But he’s not able to do the physically demanding parts of his job anymore.

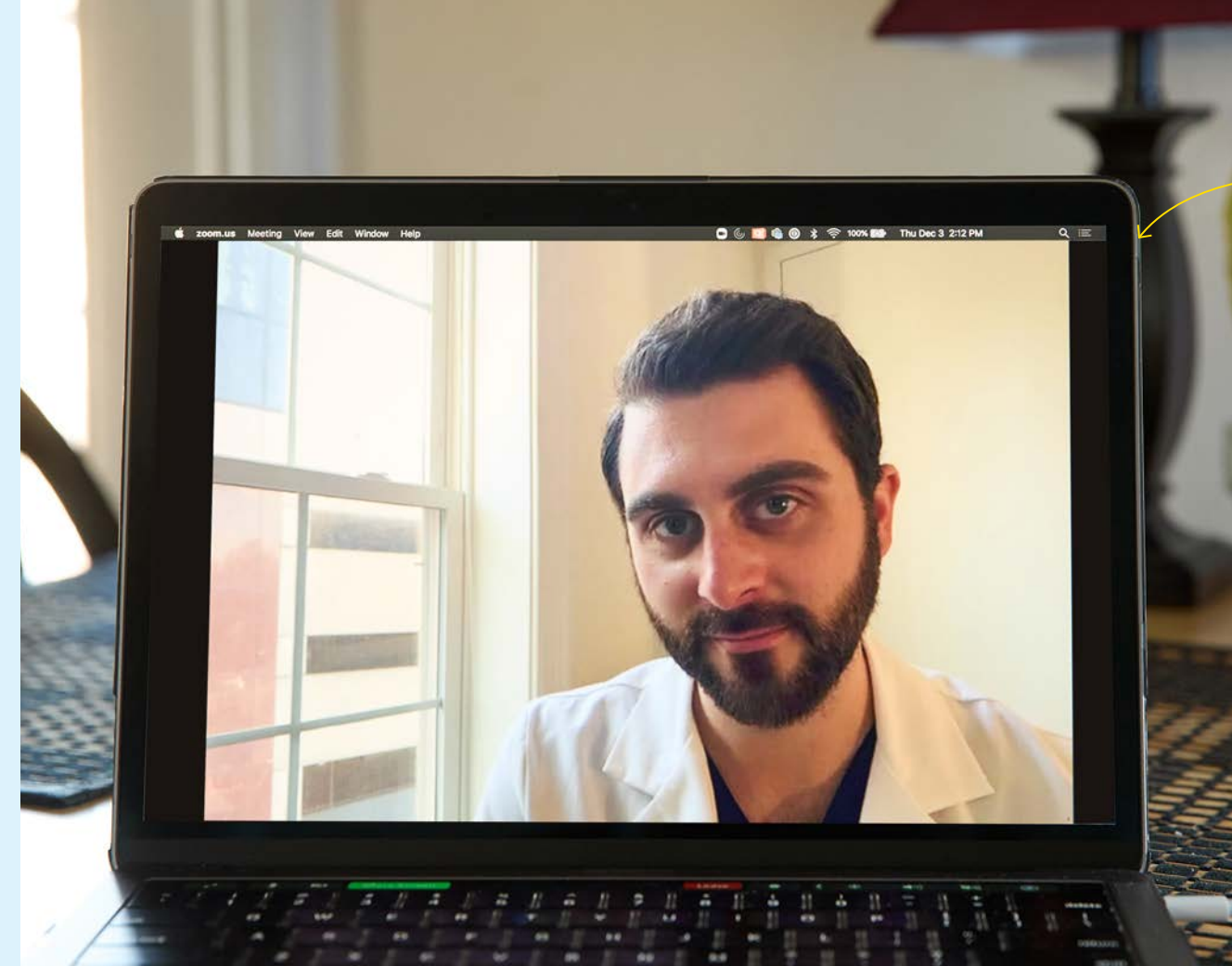
He has a long list of debilitating, lingering symptoms. “My throat and muscles hurt and my joints are very painful,” he says. “I’m always tired. I don’t want to get up, but I have to, in order to provide for my kids. That’s what keeps me going.”

Carlos still visits the hospital regularly as an

outpatient at the Post-COVID-19 Recovery clinic — a specialty clinic set up during the pandemic to help patients like him, whose COVID symptoms have not gone away long after their infection is gone. (See the story on page 6 to learn more about the clinic.)

“I feel so much better when I go see Dr. Lutchmansingh at the clinic,” he says. “I know she’s going to help me get through all these after-effects.”

Fortunately, most of us can’t begin to imagine what it’s been like for Carlos and his family. And he’s one of the lucky ones. ♥



Nate: a medical — and musical — hero

Nate came home early one morning last March after an especially tough overnight shift. YNH had just admitted its first COVID patient to the ICU, where Nate was working. He and the rest of the staff had been dreading this for weeks. It was an emotional moment, and when he got home, he sat down at his piano and recorded a beautiful rendition of Bill Withers’ classic “Lean on Me”. He posted it on Instagram.

The next day, he woke up to a message from a NY television producer who saw Nate’s video and was so inspired he put it on the morning news show. Within weeks, the video received more than 1 million views.

Last August, Nate — and four other caregivers from around the country — received the Everyday Heroes: MTV Video Music Award!

You are helping us get through the pandemic by supporting amazing physicians like Nate. Thank you!

Figuring it out on the job: treating patients with medicine and compassion

Too often, however, the only help or comfort he could provide was neither medical nor curative.

Nate recalls a heartbreaking example. A 90-year-old COVID patient was brought into the ICU. It was clear that over the next few days, she’d become even more short of breath. She would need to be put on a respirator if she was to have a chance of surviving.

But she didn’t want to be on a respirator. “There was nothing we could do medically except give her oxygen and wait,” Nate says. “As a doctor, the best I could do was spend time with her, because she couldn’t see her family except via Zoom. We’d look at photos of her family and pets together. We brought in a priest. I sang hymns at her bedside.”

Medical school certainly didn’t prepare Nate for this kind of care — or this kind of sadness. But with a disease like COVID-19, for which there are so few effective treatments, Nate feels the things he can do outside of medicine to provide caring and compassion are critically important. Treating COVID patients has taught him a lot about that.

Nate hopes that the worst will soon be behind us. We’ve learned a lot since the beginning about how to care for COVID-19 patients. And readily available vaccines appear to be close.

“Get fresh air, stay grounded, spread love, receive love — that’s what you have to do,” he says. “We’ll make it through.” ♥

Donors, we cannot thank you enough.

Your compassion and generosity are making such an important difference for so many people and their families.

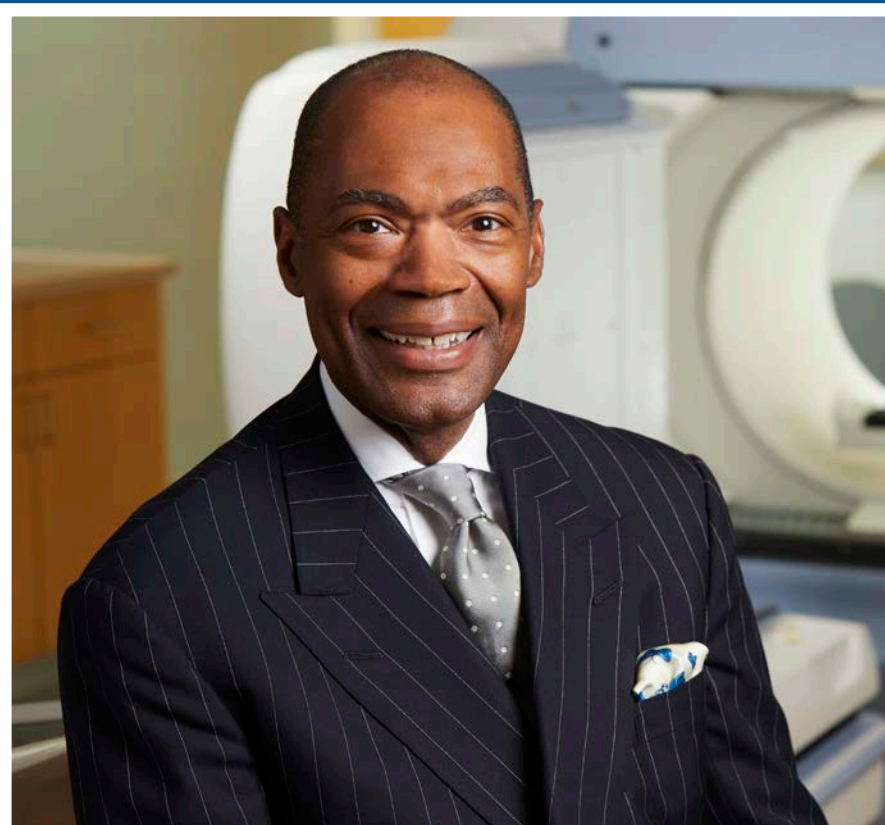
More patients arrive at YNH with this terrible disease every day — and so many more than we expected are struggling with debilitating after-effects. **They urgently need your support. Any amount will help.**

Please fill out the enclosed form and send it in with your check today. Or give online at www.givetoynh.org/covidrecovery.



Our new president, Keith Churchwell, MD, would like you to get to know him

Before taking on his new role in October, Keith Churchwell, MD, served as chief operating officer and executive vice president for YNHH, after five years as senior vice president charged with leadership of the heart and vascular service line. Prior to coming to YNHH, he served as executive director and chief medical officer of the Vanderbilt Heart and Vascular Institute.



Usually, he's working, but when he's not, Dr. Churchwell likes to watch old movies and text about them with his daughter, who is currently studying in England.

“Our donors are our partners in everything we do at YNHH. That’s why I’m delighted to have this chance to introduce myself to you.

I truly believe **donors play an incredibly important role in our ability to deliver higher quality care** on our two campuses.

I’ve been a cardiologist for well over 25 years. As the first physician in the role of president at YNHH, I have a unique viewpoint given the number of roles I have played in hospitals — both here and in other health systems.

As a clinician who has taken care of very sick patients in high-risk situations, I understand the unprecedented challenges our caregivers are facing, as well as the issues our patients are dealing with daily. We know what has happened to all of us in this pandemic will be a part of our work, our recovery, and our lives for a long time.

My experiences as a manager and administrator have helped me understand the importance of the relationships between administration, our staff, and the vital nature of providing the best circumstances for the delivery of care for all.

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has given us a unique opportunity to change and improve the way we deliver medical care as we work to fashion

pathways that are best for patients and caregivers.

Our use of telehealth is a great example. This past February, we did 25 total video visits. Since then, we have performed more than **45,000** visits on our telehealth platforms. This shows how our substantial investments in technology have been important in our ability to deliver care. We will need to invest even more as we peer into the future and assess how to best meet the demands of our patients.

Someday, I’d like you all to remember me for being a positive force in developing how we deliver care. I want everyone who walks through our doors to feel valued. And I want them to feel we have helped them on their journey to better health.

I’m always available to talk with you about the instrumental role you can play in improving and expanding our hospital. We’re on the cusp of a new age of medical technology and therapies, and you can be our partner in achieving our goals: to be the best place not only locally, but across the country, in providing health care and better health for our patients.

Please feel free to drop me a line any time to ask questions, share your ideas, or just say hello.”

→ **email Dr. Churchwell at: Dr.Churchwell@ynhh.org**

THANK YOU
for helping open
a clinic for COVID
“long-haulers”

Some COVID-19 survivors have symptoms that won’t go away

IT’S NOT SURPRISING that Carlos, who was so terribly sick with COVID-19 for so long, has lingering symptoms (read about Carlos in our cover story).

But people who had much milder cases of COVID-19 are also struggling with debilitating symptoms, weeks to months after their infections resolved. In fact, the majority of patients with persistent post-COVID-19 symptoms — sometimes referred to as “long-haulers” — were never even sick enough to require hospitalization.

Pulmonologists Denyse Lutchmansingh, MD, and Jennifer Possick, MD, started the Post-COVID-19 Recovery Program at YNHH’s Winchester Chest Clinic to help patients with persistent symptoms.

The physicians weren’t surprised to see patients with symptoms like profound shortness of breath or chest discomfort. “But we also realized this was much more than a pulmonary problem as patients were describing additional issues like extreme fatigue, racing of the heart and memory problems,” Dr. Lutchmansingh says.

They reached out to different sub-specialists to partner with them because “we quickly saw that our patients needed much more than a pulmonologist,” says Dr. Lutchmansingh. “They needed a team.”

Treating baffling symptoms while lending a sympathetic ear

There is still much we don’t understand about the lingering effects of COVID-19. Why do patients with no evidence of an active infection have symptoms, months later? Why do they have seemingly unrelated issues like heart palpitations or memory impairment? And will they ever feel completely well?

“We’re still learning about COVID-19,” says Dr. Lutchmansingh. “We call it ‘treating while learning.’ More



“Patients are afraid. They are grateful that we listen, even if we don’t have all the answers yet,” says Denyse Lutchmansingh, MD, associate director, Post-Covid-19 Recovery Program.

research is needed to better understand the cause of these symptoms and the best ways to treat them.”

The hope is that someday, when this pandemic is behind us, there will no longer be a need for the clinic. “We initially planned to follow these patients for up to one year after their initial infection. But now we don’t really know,” says Dr. Lutchmansingh. “We will be here as long as the patients need us.”

For Carlos and hundreds of other patients, the physicians at the Post-COVID-19 clinic are the only people who really understand what they’re going through. “Patients are afraid because they don’t understand what’s happening to them,” says Dr. Lutchmansingh. “They want someone to hear them and they are grateful that we listen, even if we don’t have all the answers yet.” ♦