Weak, but alive!
Carlos leaves the hospital — thanks to your help — after 30 days fighting COVID-19.

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 YNHH. 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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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. “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

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 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.”

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.