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Canceled Until Further Notice

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Canceled Until Further Notice

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I began to see my calendar transform from routine meetings to all COVID all the time. Being a nurse leader in a busy acute care hospital, my world was rapidly changing. Flatten the curve, quarantine, burn rate and, death rate became a part of nearly every conversation. We scrambled for PPE, suffered immense staffing shortages, and endured long shifts. As an adjunct, I choose to spend my “free” time helping with nursing simulation. With adaptive thinking, a virtual platform was created that allowed continued learning for students who would soon be at the bedside of COVID positive patients. At first, the students had many questions about this mysterious new virus. I was proud to be on the tip of the spear and answer the questions to the best of the knowledge that we had at the time.

April 3rd – Ring, Ring...I see that it is my Chief Master Sergeant. I know what this phone call means. I know that the only other nurse in my unit has already deployed to Buffalo for the COVID effort. I answer with poised confidence yet I am slightly nervous about what she is going to say. “We need you. Pack your bag, to include your sleeping bag, and report to Base (Niagara) at 0600 hours on Sunday”. I replied, “Yes, ma’am” and the conversation was over. I called my wife on my way home and we started to pack a bag, to include a sleeping bag.

As I arrive, the base is buzzing. Rental vans pour in as well as orange safety cones, PPE and several oddities for the COVID mission. I was pulled aside by my commander and was told that I would be the OIC (officer in charge) of our group. This was a great responsibility that I have not formally undertaken. We assembled our team and had a quick socially distanced safety briefing. We were then told to put on our masks, pile into the rental vehicles, and start driving east. We were told that we would receive more specific instructions on the way and we would either be going to Albany or NYC, so, “Drive East”. As we approached Albany, we were instructed to report to the University. Our mission: Establish a drive-through COVID swab site in conjunction with the Department of Health. The next few days we worked to establish the site as well as all of the processes in the “hot zone” where patients would be swabbed.

7 months, 3 job title changes, and a master’s degree completed, I was finally coming home. I NEVER imagined that I would be gone for so long. I never imagined that I would enroll in school and finish my second master’s degree in this time. I never imagined that I would fill the role of a company commander. I never imagined that “canceled until further notice” would turn into a journey that I will never forget as long as I live.