

CENTERING OUR VOICES

LIVING WITH A COMPROMISED
IMMUNE SYSTEM THROUGH THE
PANDEMIC



TRACEY

CASTLEMAINE RESIDENT

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I recently turned 50 and I'm a registered nurse. I live with my husband and we have two adult sons aged 24 and 22. I work at Castlemaine Hospital in the acute ward and on the Covid vaccination clinic. The majority of people have been very positive, we've had a few people thank us for what we're doing. At the same time we've had quite a number of people who feel they're being forced to be there, and they can be a little bit aggressive towards us. There's just a little bit of attitude in the way they speak to you, it's not like we can do anything about it. We didn't make the rules, we're just trying to do our job, but on the whole, we've been very busy and I think the update of the vaccination in the Castlemaine area has been very positive and strong, with a good percentage of the population.

In 2020 my husband was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, which hasn't gone the best. His surgery didn't go as planned, and he's terminal. He's 52 years old and having chemotherapy every fortnight to basically stay alive. I supposed I realise what Covid can do to him. We're all vaccinated but he could pick up Covid from somebody very easily that's not vaccinated, and the little time we already have with him, basically Covid will kill him if he gets it.

It's not just about protecting yourself from Covid. If I get Covid, I'm healthy and fit and I'll probably just feel really crappy and be sick, but I won't die. But if I bring Covid home from work and give it to my husband, I could potentially kill him, so that's what I'd like people to know. You're not just getting vaccinated to protect yourself – it's not just about you. I think in society it's very much "me me and what effects me and it's my right and it's my this and it's my that". It's not just you. It's somebody that can't be vaccinated, or somebody that even if they are vaccinated, the outcome isn't great for them if they catch it.

John and I met I was 16 and he was 19, we've basically been together ever since. He's just a very loving man. He works really hard to provide for us, and even though he's going through chemotherapy every second week, he still goes to work practically full time. He's barely taken a day off the whole time, apart from the times he's been in hospital having the surgery. We've been married for 25 years but we've been together for over 30. I've spent more of my life with him than without him, I suppose.

After his surgery we were told that it had metastasised to his liver, and there's no chance of recovery for my husband unfortunately. We went into surgery thinking that the cancer and his pancreas would be removed, and it was during the surgery that they realised that it had already metastasised to his liver. The day was going one way, and did a complete backflip and the day ended completely differently. There's things he's going to miss out on, and there's things that his children won't be able to share with him such as if they choose to get married, if they find a life partner, if they have children, there's always going to be that something missing.

Well we have a very strong support group in family and friends, but I think they found it hard that they couldn't be with us as such. It's been hard in that sense. The group of friends got together and arranged for people to cook for us when John was in hospital and when he came home, but they had to just leave it at the front door and run. It's been a little bit tough, the isolation part. Because I can still go to work, it hasn't been as tough as it would have been if we were all stuck at home.

The decisions that people need to make is to make sure you've got your mask with you, make sure you're thinking of the other people in the community, not just yourself. Make sure you're aware that you could be carrying Covid and pass it on to other people. Am I protecting other people, not just myself, are my actions preventing someone else from getting this disease? Carrying hand sanitiser in your bag or in the car is a really good idea. Washing your hands regularly is a good idea, especially if you've been at the supermarket because you don't realise how many things you're touching. You're touching the trolley, you're touching products on the shelf, you're picking up and putting down fruit. People don't realise exactly how many things you touch in the day. I don't think people realise also how many times you touch your face. It's amazing how many times you will touch your face in a day.

I think people are becoming complacent because the rules are changing all the time, and they're told one thing, even with the vaccinations you were told – get double vaxxed. Then life will go back to normal, we can open up. That hasn't happened! You look at Western Australia, Queensland, people went and got double vaxxed, then they changed the rules and you still couldn't visit your loved ones in hospital. People still can't go visit their parents in nursing homes.

I go to work and I have to care for sick people as well. I work with people in palliative care who are dying, and I have to be professional. I'm much more aware of what is going to happen to my husband John than other people. I think people just need to know that nurses have private lives as well. The last thing I want to do is bring this home to my husband because I was doing my job. There's this real "me" mentality in society at the moment. I don't think it was like that fifty years ago, or even longer. If something had to be done, people just did it for the good of the community and I think during Covid, there's been a loss of that, doing something for the community. It just seems to be doing what's best for me and only me. That little circle that surrounds one person and not people who are immune compromised and can't necessarily afford to get sick, because if they get sick it's not just like the flu for them. It can be life threatening.

I'd just like to stress again that getting vaccinated isn't just about you, it's about protecting people that the virus can kill. It's protecting the people that might just, when you get it it will seem like an inconvenient, horrible flu, or bad cold, but for somebody that is immune compromised it's a matter of life and death. I'd like people to realise that nurses are really struggling at the moment. The person that's nursing you could be dealing with their own stuff at home, with a very sick person and they've got to deal with you being unwell, but then go home to somebody that's unwell as well, and worrying about whether just doing their job is going to effect the people they love.