

Do it for Someone You Care About

I would like you to meet a special patient of mine. While Mary isn't her real name, her story is true and she asked me to share it with you. A single mom with a full time job, life always offered a challenge or two, but life was good.

One such challenge came in the early morning hours last spring when she awoke with horrible body aches. She hurt everywhere. Despite having had a good night's sleep, she felt exhausted and reluctantly called her boss and told him she wouldn't be at work that day. She knew what she had, her son was sick with it earlier in the week. He caught it from his best-friend at school. Both were better in a couple of days. She would be fine.

By mid-morning the cough started. She had chills and a fever of 103-degrees by noon. Two hours later, Mary felt short of breath and her chest hurt with every cough. She dreaded calling her parents, but she knew she wasn't going to be fine. In the Emergency Room her chest X-ray showed pneumonia in both lungs and the amount of oxygen in her blood stream was dangerously low. Her worried doctor called it respiratory failure and worked all night to get her lungs to function better. In the morning, the helicopter came for her.

Mary doesn't remember much about her stay at the teaching hospital, but she spent a month in the Intensive Care Unit as a ventilator breathed for her. Her parents watched helplessly as organ systems failed one by one. When her kidneys stopped working, a dialysis machine appeared at her bedside. Liquid food provided nourishment through a tube snaked up her nose and down into her stomach. Grim-faced doctors tried to prepare her parents for that which no parent can be prepared for. Perhaps, the most tragic news came from the laboratory. Mary had H1N1 Influenza A, a virus infamous

for striking young, otherwise healthy people particularly hard. It was one of the influenza viruses protected against in last year's flu shot. But Mary didn't get a flu shot last year, neither did her son or his friend. Three missed opportunities that changed Mary's life.

Miraculously, Mary got better. She spent weeks in a rehabilitation hospital relearning the basics of life. I saw her in the office not long ago. While it will take a year of hard work and no income before she can return to work, she is grateful to be alive. If you won't get a flu shot to protect yourself, do it for someone you care about, or even for a perfect stranger.

Flu shots or more information about influenza are available at the Adams County Health Department.

William E. Hablitzel, M.D. is the Adams County Health Commissioner. He can be reached at the Adams County Health Department, 923 Sunrise Avenue, West Union, Ohio, 45693