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- Tracy Churchill

A World Without You In It

by Tracy Churchill

This letter is for you. The overworked, overtired, selfless healthcare worker who has been thrust into the spotlight during a dark time for humanity. Please know that you are so important. In the future, your grandchildren will ask you about these harsh times. And you will pause and reflect on everything you are living through right now.

Although the present (and the near future) looks grim, can you imagine this time without you? I can. And I know in my heart it would be so much worse. You have held the hands of the dying – who are separated from their families. You have seen guilt and shame in the eyes of the survivors. You have missed meal breaks, toilet breaks, and missed seeing your own family in order to preserve the life of other humans. Only now do people recognize our professions as what they truly are. Heroic pathways for warriors. Those who face it all – and turn up again the next day knowing there is more waiting.

A world without you in it would mean less compassion and kindness in the world. And in truth, you may feel like you are running on empty. But the simple act of showing up is kindness and courage in itself. A world without you in it would mean more work for your peers and less care for the people who so dearly need it.

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and kindness in the world.**

A world without you in it would mean a world of less awareness. Only through healthcare professionals sharing pictures of their bruised faces on social media, or their plea for mask wearing, social distancing, and thoughtful compassion has the wider public been able to see the devastating truth of this pandemic. In the past, our work went unnoticed, we were the lightworkers in the shadows of society. We were in the dark rooms. The crying rooms where people faced their fears of disability, disease, death; the gravest of losses. Those dark rooms have proliferated. Overtaking hospitals, towns, cities, and even states. The work we do cannot be hidden any longer. And when we choose to speak, we are now being heard. A world without you in it means millions more would be dead already.

What does this spotlight mean? It means our friends, families, and neighbors have a brief window into our world. Our double shifts. Our night shifts. Our missed meal breaks. The accusing stares of those still waiting when we need to leave after a 16-hour shift. And they are beginning to understand what it takes to be one of us. This small glimpse is providing our community with a clearer picture of who we really are.

We are warriors. Kind and compassionate, but with inner strength. And it is this strength that will see us through this time and the ones after that. Frontline workers recognize the greatness in each other. Although we have family outside, most times they do not 'get' us. Even well-meaning friends and partners don't understand the horrors we have faced, and this exposure builds comradery within frontline workers. We need each other for that. A world without you in it means one less understanding ear for a peer. One less polystyrene cup of coffee shoved towards a friend at 4am, as our eyelids droop but we still have hours to go. It seems rough that the best support we can get is from other overworked and underfed healthcare workers- other people who also need their cups filled. And in times like this, we need to pass the cup around. Muster a kind word, a knowing glance, or a text or note after a shift. It could make all the difference.

A world without you in it would mean we were several steps closer to being an extinct species. Your knowledge, skill, and experience are preventing humanity from being one step closer to extinction.

And more than anything, this is what we need right now. Our humanity. To sit beside the dying. To hold a hand, or comfort a survivor. To do the right thing, even when it is hard. And to know when to be soft and flexible in the face of rigidity.

I write this because when we are so under pressure, without support the future can look bleak and hopeless. I have lost colleagues who felt this way and I recognize the danger ahead. I can't sit beside them and tell them how priceless, worthy, and valuable they were to all of us. So, I must say this:

A world without you in it is a colder, darker world.

I hope that in writing this to you, your cup gets a bit fuller and there is a bit more in there to pass around the circle. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, and from all the future people who will only exist because of the work you are doing right now.

The world is better, brighter, and warmer for you being in it.



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“Anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture. Mead said that the first sign of civilization in an ancient culture was a femur (thighbone) that had been broken and then healed.

Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are meat for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal. broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery. Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts.”

Ira Byock: *The Best Care Possible: A Physician's Quest to Transform Care Through the End of Life*