



## NURSES WEEK

## With Patients Away From Loved Ones and Nurses Wearing PPE, Human Connection Feels Different at Ellis ICU

BY ERIKA LEIGH | SCHENECTADY  
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Nurses across the country are doing things that are not always part of their job description, things textbooks just don't teach.

"You have to be flexible, and you have to be able to think on your feet and see the whole picture, instead of just the thing in front of you," said Ellis Medicine intensive care unit nurse Brittany McGowan.

That whole picture now includes connecting patients with family using tablets, or using personal cell phones so their COVID-19 patients can hear the voices of their loved ones.

"It's probably been the toughest thing for me just to kind of be a bridge between the family members and the families," said Ellis ICU nurse Elizabeth Wyman, "and it's tough because people are trying to make life-and-death

decisions, and they can't see their families.”



**Erika Leigh** ✓  
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Thank you [#NURSES!!](#) These three heroes work [@EllisMedicine](#) in the ICU. Meet Katie Dzikas, Liz Wyman and Brittany McGowan. You can hear from them tomorrow on [@SPECNewsAlbany](#) starting at 6 am. [#NursesWeek2020](#) [#NursesDay2020](#)



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“Family helps these patients heal,” said nurse Katie Dzikas. “Family helps us cope. It helps us understand who that patient is in the bed. It gives them an identity and a reason to survive this.”

And now, there's hand-holding, talking to non-responsive patients, and even craft projects. The latter came when McGowan realized patients couldn't see past the nurses' personal protective equipment.

“I asked nurses to send me their picture of choice ... and I printed them out and I put them on little name tags and laminated them, so that we could tape it to the front of the gown or hang it outside the room,” McGowan said.





Members of the community also donated prayer blankets for the unit. Dzikas said the blankets offer a sign of hope and resilience.

“[We] know that it's more than just us,” she said. “It's more than the nurse at their bedside. It's the community and it's the world as a whole, praying and hoping for resilience and recovery.”

The nurses are also, as a precautionary measure, distancing from their own families at home. McGowan hasn't seen her family downstate in about two months, and Dzikas isn't even going near her 13-year-old twin boys.

“We distance from them, but you know, it changes what you're thankful for,” Dzikas said. “You know you can't go home and hug your children because of this, and I think a lot of nurses are struggling with this.”

Wyman's situation is a little different. Her husband is also a nurse at a local hospital, and they have a routine.

“On the days we both work, we only have one shower, so someone has to stand in the garage until we can decontaminate,” Wyman said.

“Sometimes you want to talk about your day and sometimes you don't, so if you do, you have someone who understands where you're coming from, and someone who understands why you don't want to.”

This is a second career for all three nurses. McGowan said that, even if she wasn't recognized for it, she'd still be there.

“I would still be here sitting at the bedside, holding someone's hand, regardless of whether I was going to get anything out of it,” she said. “I would do it for free.”

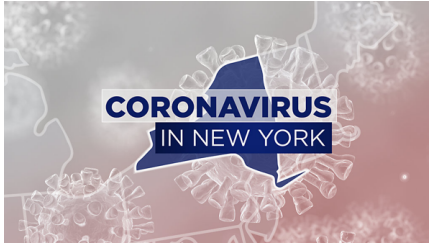
“Would I choose it again? One hundred percent,” Wyman said. “I love the people I work with, I loved the place I work, I love the work that I do, I love my patients, so if I could choose it again, I would.”

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