

My mom Stacey is a real-life superhero. As an emergency department nurse, she has worked on the frontlines of the pandemic since the beginning, always putting the needs of her patients first. Her dedication to patient care was tested when she faced the ethical decision whether to blow the whistle and report patient abuse. The decision ultimately cost her her job and opened a major investigation into overall patient care at the hospital.

Working in the ED as a nurse is no picnic. Being constantly understaffed, underappreciated, and underpaid can make almost anyone callous to the healthcare system. But not my mom. She is loving, kind and compassionate, no matter how unruly or difficult of a patient. One morning while acting as triage nurse, she found a patient in the waiting area exhibiting bizarre behavior. When she questioned the staff of her status, they told her the patient refused care and was waiting on a ride home. The nurse and doctor who saw her earlier that morning told Stacey that the patient was “crazy.” They said she was uncooperative and screaming that everyone had demons. Both the nurse and doctor, laughing hysterically, told Stacey they sprayed “holy water” on her to “make the demons go away.” Instead of treating the patient, the doctor mocked her by squirting her with water then discharged her to go home without any care.

After some investigating and police intervention, Stacey found out the woman suffered from severe Schizophrenia and had leaped off a second story balcony the previous night. Stacey pleaded with the charge nurse that she be re-seen, but her boss adamantly refused to readmit her. It took police involvement before another doctor would finally see her again. The woman had a broken pelvis and was rushed immediately to surgery. While being left alone in the waiting area, she suffered internal bleeding and sustained a life-threatening injury.

Because of the woman’s mental illness, she was unable to communicate the extent of her injuries to anyone. Instead of being treated like a human being, the night staff neglected her,

abused her, and almost cost the woman her life. This put my mom into a very precarious situation. Reporting her coworkers and her boss would mean for potential backlash and retaliation. She decided she could not ethically go back to work, so she made the very hard decision to report the abuse and resign. My single mother of two quit her job because her moral conscious could not allow her to work with people who engaged in patient abuse.

By filing complaints, the Office of Health Facility Licensure and Certification (OFLAC) became involved. Their mission is to “shape healthy environments for clients, patients and residents within health care facilities by promoting the quality services and high standards of care.” Her reporting not only saved a woman’s life but allowed for the proper government agency to investigate the incident. OFLAC reports their findings publicly for complete transparency. In conclusion of the investigation, firings had occurred and new training policies were implemented to combat any future patient neglect or abuse.

My mom is a tried-and-true whistleblower. She risked her career and the uncertainty of her future to expose patient abuse. She exhibited true heroism in upholding her moral duty to severe and protect her patients, even when it meant going up against her superiors. People like my mother are the ones making the change we want to see in the world. I admire her bravery and hope that if I am ever faced with a similar situation, I too will choose what is right, no matter the cost.