

US COVID doc: We are 'burned out'

January 20 2022



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Exhausted and overwhelmed by the influx of mostly unvaccinated COVID patients, Dr. James Samuel Pope, an intensive care physician at Hartford Hospital in the US state of Connecticut, hopes the Omicron wave of the pandemic will be the last.

"It's been very much the wild west for about the last two weeks," says

Pope, medical director of the ICU at Hartford Hospital. "More ER visits in a day than we've ever had."

Most of the patients Pope sees today are unvaccinated, many of them intubated or attached to ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) systems to help them breathe.

Pope knows that not all the patients he is taking care of will go home.

"The frustration is very real," Pope says, making rounds with the medical team and going over the cases of each patient, who range in age between 22 and 80-something.

"All of us are burned out," Pope tells AFP, especially [health care workers](#) who have been taking care of coronavirus patients since the beginning of the pandemic.

"It's hard to find somebody who's bubbly and feels like this has been an uplifting and positive life-changing experience. It has not," he says, though he acknowledges there have been some moments of inspiration.

Another medical worker approaches Pope, asking him to sign a patient's death certificate. There is an empty bed visible in the ward, where a COVID-19 patient died during the night.

Pope remembers the other patients he has lost. He says most don't even realize they are dying, because they are so sedated.

"We had a number of young people who died that we tried very hard to save, we just couldn't," he says.

"You don't want to put any kind of value judgment on people's lives, but you at least can feel like if a 90-year-old passes away, they lived life."

"But not somebody who's 25 or 18, which was (the age of) the youngest person that I took care of," Pope says.

The doctor says conditions have improved in the last two years, but he still laments the state of the pandemic.

He says ICU beds have not been empty in some time, and that the hospital's ER has recently become overrun as the Omicron variant sweeps through the country.

He says he is not sure he wants to keep doing this work unless something changes.

"I will not keep doing this. It is a drain," he says.

"I hope this is it. I hope this is the last big surge."

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Citation: US COVID doc: We are 'burned out' (2022, January 20) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-covid-doc.html>

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