

Anxious nurse on the frontline vows 'We're not giving up. We hope people trust us.'

Chelsy Vanderberg's anxieties are heightened each time she prepares for another night shift at the [Grey Nuns Community Hospital](#), on the frontlines in the fight against COVID-19 coronavirus.

"We pride ourselves on being able to help the sick, but now there's always that 'What if' in the back of our minds," Vanderberg said. "In Italy they're having to make heartbreaking choices of who gets to live and who gets the resources the hospital has left. I can't imagine if it were get to the point where someone walked up to me and I had to say 'We're not going to treat you,' like some health care workers in Italy have had to say.

"I can't even fathom having to say those words."

As of March 26, there were [486 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Alberta](#) and 3,452 across Canada.



Chelsy Vanderberg

While it is a far cry from the 80,529 cases and 8,215 deaths in Italy, Vanderberg says she and her fellow health-care professionals are both cautious and hopeful that a vaccine will be discovered and the outbreak can be stopped.

In Alberta, 24 people infected with COVID-19 have been hospitalized and two

have died. But she believes the province is well armed for this fight.

“Today we’re OK, and we feel prepared,” she said. “But there’s always something new to learn about how we will protect ourselves. You’re constantly so hyper-vigilant over things that would normally never give you anxiety, like washing your hands or touching your face.

“Whatever happens, we’re not giving up. We hope people trust us and believe that we will get through this and we will take care of everyone.”

Since March 22, physicians and nurses at the Grey Nuns hospital have been required to wear face shields and masks at all times. The hospital has also established a “quarantine zone” for COVID-19 patients, and all health-care workers must register all masks or gloves they use to keep a close tally of equipment.

Vanderberg was devastated the first time she saw her co-workers’ faces covered by protective equipment with fear in their eyes. It affected her so strongly that she wrote about it on social media.

“I cried at work this day. I cried a lot. I cried more than the time I handed a five-month-old deceased baby to her parents so they could hold her one last time,” Vanderberg wrote in a March 24 Facebook and Instagram post that went viral. The post has now received more than 5,000 shares and 800 comments.

“This is the day I realized that Covid-19 was right here, in a place I call home. It’s the day I realized it was just the beginning.”

Vanderberg was surprised by the amount of attention and comments her post received. Her detailed look at how this global pandemic is affecting health-care workers resonates with so many people.

“I wanted to express in a very raw and real way just what we are going through,” she said. “At the Grey Nuns, we truly feel like a family. We thrive on the social aspect of our job and hold it dear to us. Now, we can no longer see each other smile; our laughs are muffled by our masks. Those were once the things that kept us going.”



Dr. Mary Ellen Haggerty

For many health-care professionals, faith is an indispensable resource during this difficult and traumatic time, says Dr. Mary Ellen Haggerty, president of St. Luke's Physicians Guild of Alberta, which represents Catholic doctors in the province.

"It's a lot to put your life on the line, especially if you're working in an intensive care unit during this pandemic," said Haggerty, a family physician in Edmonton.

"You always realize there's a possibility that you can get this disease yourself. Already, many doctors have been infected and died in other places. So faith is an asset for coming to terms with that reality."

Vanderberg agrees.

"It gives my family comfort and hope, knowing there is a greater power and we're working with Him," said Vanderberg, who keeps her Christian faith close to heart.

"A lot of our nurses go to work every day with faith that we are being protected by God. It definitely helps, but there's no denying that fear is still there. All the faith in the world could not take away the fear that a lot of our health-care workers have right now."

But Vanderberg is hopeful that, because of social distancing and other protective measures, she and her colleagues are prepared for the challenges ahead.

"As a nurse, I signed up for this, and I love what I do," Vanderberg said. "My job is to care for the sick and the scared, and I will do so, every day, with

brave eyes and a masked smile. I do not ask for sympathy. I just ask for understanding.”

Vanderberg’s key message for Albertans is one many have heard by public health officials: Stay home.

“People have to take this seriously, for their own sake and their family’s sake. People need to stay home so that we can stay healthy and go to work every single day.”