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HEALTH CARE HEROES

MEETING COMPLEX NUTRITION NEEDS OF COVID-19 PATIENTS

VERONICA SOMMER

CRITICAL CARE DIETITIAN, NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/LINCOLN

My Role: I make sure ICU patients have appropriate nutrition and what's needed to support their immune system. This is a challenge when patients are on a ventilator and unable to feed themselves. Some patients receive artificial feeding through an IV, and we make sure we aren't over or under feeding.

When the surge began, each day brought something new. It was amazing how we did so much, so quickly. But we were overwhelmed. Every patient who came in was high risk and needed to be seen within 24 hours.

Our patient population is already challenging with comorbidities that increase their risk for complications with COVID-19. That took a toll on us. But we were doing overtime, buckling down to get in as many assessments as we could, and everyone really came through and stepped up to meet the challenge. We also had help from Army dietitians who came when we needed them most. That was really appreciated.

Impact of COVID-19: In early March, one of the ICU attending physicians reached out to me to discuss nutrition needs for patients who were coming in. We knew it would be a challenge to feed them while keeping the in isolation, in negative pressure rooms and proning position. Treating a patient with COVID-19 is unique from other ICU patients. Our conversation became this interdisciplinary communication where recommendations from dietitians were discussed with doctors and nurses.

We also reached out to nutrition managers at other facilities to discuss their care plans. Together, we brainstormed to make sure we were doing the most we can because it was new to everybody.



We used evidence-based research to determine an appropriate diet with calories and protein to treat acute lung injury patients. It became part of our protocol. Because COVID-19 is pro-inflammatory, we created anti-inflammatory formulas that included Omega-3 and fish oils. After everyone was on the same page with the protocol, we began working with head nurses to make sure they had everything they needed.

Why I'm on the frontlines: Nutrition plays an important role in wound healing and the immune system's ability to fight off a virus or bacterium. My job is to promote good health, and I enjoy helping and educating people on healthy habits. I knew I could help people through food.

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