



“Flow” – Connie Herrera, MD

Artist statement

My art piece was inspired by a patient I took care of during COVID19 surge. She was an older Spanish speaking patient who came in at the urgency of her family. She had a family get together the week prior to her presenting and fell ill a few days later. Her hesitancy in coming to the hospital was that she heard of people coming in and then never leaving. Her story was like that of many before her, she was ill but got more ill after admission, requiring the highest level of oxygen that could be given without intubation via high flow nasal canula on a machine called vapotherm. This small blue box with lit up numbers would be a machine that would cause her to become so anxious that she became her own worst enemy. Every beep, every flicker of the lights. I will never forget one morning when in desperation she said "You are killing me with this machine and with this oxygen". It was from that moment for the next several days that I would have to have the long discussion with her what we were doing to treat her COVID19 illness with (medications and oxygen) and that yes, this wasn't a "normal" thing for a human body to need but that her body needed the oxygen to pull through. After many tears, crying out, calls with her family and talking her down from wanting to leave the hospital despite needing maximum oxygen or asking to be intubated to not endure the forceful flow of oxygen through her nose down to her lungs.

The experience is not unlike many others but I had not had a patient be so concerned about the force of the oxygen like this patient was. The thought of flow and oxygen were what inspired this painting. Usually these words invoke a feeling of calm and life but to this patient and her experience we caused anxiety and thoughts of death or execution. I wanted to draw upon the idea of flow with the color blue and the appearance of a gust of wind or water juxtaposed with the harsh lines of the vapotherm machine and the information it conveyed to the health care team. It basically is a representation of the contrast of the medical knowledge needed to get through this pandemic as well as the emotion and basic needs humanity had to confront during this hard time.

Connie Herrera