

PRINT-Comfort Through Connection During COVID-19: A Patient's Story

"It is very scary and it is very real."

That's how recovering COVID-19 patient Steve Looney of Kewanee reflects on his journey when he was diagnosed just three days after his wife tested positive.

The 57 year-old Looney is a healthy, active guy. He took all the precautions to avoid becoming infected with the novel coronavirus in August. He knew them well from his role as a regional director of facilities and operations at three western region hospitals for OSF HealthCare. After his wife Beth returned from a short trip, she tested positive and they both quarantined at home, in separate rooms, but a few days later Looney started having a headache that seemed to get worse.

After his test and a few anxious days awaiting results, Looney was diagnosed and immediately signed up for a program he knew provided in-home digital support and care for COVID-19 patients – [OSF OnCall Connect](#) (called the Pandemic Health Worker program at the time). The program is available at no cost under a state of Illinois government contract and has been used by hundreds of people across the state, including students, faculty and staff at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

"I had a lot of anxiety the first part of it and actually for three or four days. You worry, 'How bad is this going to get?' So that was a lot of peace of mind and I really appreciate that. I would recommend the OnCall program (OSF OnCall Connect) for anybody, especially if you are anxious or nervous or concerned about it (a COVID-19 diagnosis) because it really does ease your mind." he shared.

OSF OnCall Connect provides two-way communication apps and twice-a-day symptom monitoring for patients whose symptoms are mild enough they are able to remain at home, where they are most comfortable. Looney read through educational material provided but everything else was available through free apps he could download on his phone.

"We always have our cell phone with us and it was really easy. I did not have a tablet. It was offered to me. I said, 'No I can do everything on my phone.' It worked out great," according to Looney. He really looked forward to the second check-in, later in the day, when he usually started feeling worse.

He recalled, "Because I love the outdoors, I did sit in my garage a lot in a lawn chair and just sit and stare outside. I would lay on the couch most of the time. It was really weird though because in the mornings when I would get up I would feel really good for about two hours and then it would be a total decline the rest of the day."

In addition to a bad headache, at the height of the infection Looney also suffered what he called really bad body aches, fatigue, sore throat, congestion, nausea and diarrhea. He appreciated recommendations from his OnCall Connect care team.

"As I got worse and some of my symptoms got worse, they would send me back recommendations of 'Have you tried this over-the-counter medication?' then again at 7 p.m. they would ask me the same questions," he remembered about his daily exchanges. Looney felt comforted knowing someone with medical knowledge of the novel virus would be checking in.

With plenty of time to reflect while he was stuck in his house, Looney started thinking about how this kind of isolation would affect others, say someone diagnosed when they were away from home, living alone and far from family, or even the college student away from home held up in a dorm on their own.

He mused, "You might not have your prescriptions, you might not have your groceries. You know, the OnCall program did offer and say, 'Is there anything we can help you with,' and that was important."

Looney's recovery allowed him to return to work after standard quarantine. He feels lucky he didn't require any medical intervention besides over-the-counter medicine and that he has no lasting impact. His wife Beth took 6

weeks to recover and required treatment with a steroid. Today, the behavioral health navigator for OSF HealthCare says she's feeling great but now has a greater understanding of the physical and emotional toll COVID-19 can take.

People who have tested positive or who suspect they have been infected can be referred to OSF OnCall Connect through their health care provider or through the 24/7 nurse hotline.

If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and it is not an emergency, use one of the digital care options offered by OSF. You can connect through Clare, a digital assistant available through the OSF website, or by calling the 24/7 nurse hotline at 833-OSF-KNOW (833-673-5669).