

**Amy Ishkanian**

*Kings County Hospital*

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As a Speech-Language Pathologist at Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn, New York I work with adult patients who have communication or swallowing disorders due to a variety of acute or chronic medical conditions. When the COVID-19 pandemic swept in, it was a whirlwind to see how the entire hospital changed day by day until almost every unit became isolated for COVID-19. Patients who have COVID-19, or are recovering from it, may have difficulty communicating, and many are at risk for dysphagia (swallowing disorder) due to difficulty coordinating breathing and swallowing.

Speech-language pathologists have a particular role in helping patients recover. For some patients who may require a tracheostomy tube or ventilator we can provide tools to facilitate communication, such as picture or letter boards. We also assess the patient's readiness for a speaking valve, which will enable them to regain their voice and improve respiratory function. Additionally, we assess to make sure patients are eating and drinking without difficulty swallowing to prevent food or drink from going to their lungs.

One of the most difficult aspects of working in the hospital during this time was seeing severely ill patients without their loved ones by their side. At times I felt I could make the most impact by helping to facilitate communication between family members. In one such instance, I found myself holding a phone to a patient's ear for forty-five minutes while she talked and prayed with her daughter. The patient unknowingly had lost her husband the day she was admitted to the hospital.

I have been inspired by the healthcare workers around me and the strength of the patients and families that I've worked with. I remind myself that even though we have to keep our distance, we are getting through this together.

**Jack Hamparian**

*Walgreens*

River Vale, NJ

When the coronavirus first made its way to the east coast in low numbers, we started making small adjustments to our everyday work. Work surfaces were cleaned more, gloves were being used to unload shipments, and extra caution was taken overall to keep ourselves and more importantly customers healthy. However, once the virus reached pandemic levels as professional institutions such as the Center of Disease Control (CDC) began revealing just how easy it is to spread the virus, work at Walgreens took a 180 degree turn. Within a span of a few days, masks

and gloves were made mandatory for every employee and social distancing markers and posters were placed on floors, doors, and windows to remind customers of the distance needed to reduce transmission. Physical barriers were set up at every register and throughout the pharmacy to further limit the spread of the disease. The biggest adjustment came at the pharmacy itself. Those at the front end of the store worked with the pharmacy to fulfill orders placed by customers so they have opportunities to either pick them up at the pharmacy drive-thru or curbside. The goal of this strategy was to limit the amount of people coming into the store as much as possible so employees can better stock shelves of essential items and do routine cleaning.

Our company provided us with a list of acceptable items that customers can ask for at the drive-thru (mainly over the counter medicine) to put together with prescriptions if they had ones to pick up or as individual orders that could fit through the drive-thru slot. This restriction wasn't used for curbside pickup. For that process, customers would call ahead of time and provide an employee with a list of items needed before paying for the order ahead of time and picking it up outside the store. Grocery stores were already using this shopping method before the coronavirus hit our country. That adjustment was easier to adapt to because it gave employees more space to shop since less people were in the store.

One word to symbolize these changes is 'contactless.' That was the main goal from the start- limit contact/interaction between people to limit the spread of the disease, though that may sound socially challenging.