

Hiro Nitta

Hiro Nitta, Senior Scientific Fellow, Roche Diagnostics



For

20 years, Hiro developed tests for those with cancer. His life-threatening experience with COVID-19 left him more dedicated than ever to helping patients.

Lying in my hospital bed, struggling to breathe and receiving intravenous treatments for a COVID-19 infection, I thought: This could be the end for me. But I knew I had to survive. While we have made great progress in helping cancer patients live longer lives through tests and treatments, I still have so much work to do.

For the past year, I was so cautious – wearing my mask, sanitizing and social distancing. But as I returned from a short road trip in late February, I started feeling sick to my stomach and was running a fever of 102 degrees Fahrenheit. As soon as I got home, I isolated myself. I continued to feel worse. Out of precaution, I took a rapid COVID-19 test at a nearby pharmacy, which came back negative.

By then I was experiencing new and worsening symptoms – runny nose, cough, mucus in my lungs, chest pain, shortness of breath, body aches, chills. I drove to the hospital emergency room. This time, I tested positive for COVID-

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19. The doctor sent me home and told me to manage it as I would with flu – rest, fluids and acetaminophen.

The next day, my symptoms were worse. I returned to the emergency room, where they found I also had pneumonia and my blood oxygen levels were dangerously low. I was transferred by ambulance to another hospital at midnight, and started treatment with steroid and antiviral drugs. I asked when I might be able to go home and their response was not positive. I felt these might be my last days.

But the treatment worked and I started feeling better. In the late evening of day five, I went home, armed with an oxygen tank.

Throughout my career as a cancer researcher, I have visited many cancer centers and seen many patients, and their families, waiting in the lobby. I thought I understood those people and what they were going through. But through this experience, I understand now, more than ever, the fear and hope patients feel, and their worry over limited treatment options.

As we at Roche work to develop better cancer tests and treatments, more lives will be saved. I am honored to be part of this mission. After two months on supplemental oxygen, countless lingering effects, and two negative COVID-19 tests, I am now finally back in the lab. I've never been more ready to get back to work.

So many people do not survive this terrible disease. I got a second chance to live. I believe I survived so I could work harder than ever to give cancer patients their second chance. That is what this experience has left me with, and what drives me to make a greater difference.