

Opinion

Nurses on the front lines have seen firsthand what below-par COVID-19 leadership means: Carol Roe and Eileen Kilbane Gordon

Updated Oct 28, 5:23 AM; Posted Oct 28, 5:23 AM



COVID-19 survivor Edwina Cain is surrounded by her team of doctors, nurses and medical professionals on April 10, 2020, at Richmond University Medical Center on Staten Island, New York, the day she was released after eight days in the hospital, including five days on a ventilator. In a guest column today, nurses Carol Roe and Eileen Kilbane Gordon pay tribute to the nurse-heroes of the pandemic -- and urge voters to pay attention to their concerns about deficiencies in the nation's pandemic leadership.

CLEVELAND -- Martha (Martie) Allen, a nurse and former officer in the Ohio Air National Guard, was hospitalized for weeks this summer with COVID-19. She recalls feeling so upset about the lack of federal guidance on the pandemic that she vowed when she recovered to fight to get a compassionate president elected. She now spends recovery time encouraging nurses to speak out about President Donald

Trump's indifference to people being infected with, and dying from COVID-19. We two nurses are speaking out for her and the more than 220,000 Americans who have died from COVID-19, [including over 1,700 health care workers](#).

Many institutions whose purpose it is to keep us safe and healthy — hospitals, nursing homes, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — are no longer trusted by the public. But the American public has voted nurses, 4 million strong, [the most trusted profession for 18 years running](#). The World Health Organization denoted 2020 as the [Year of the Nurse and Midwife](#).

The reality is that, despite being so trusted, nurses are seldom asked for our opinions, illustrated by the fact there is not a single nurse on the White House Coronavirus Task Force.

Now, the most trusted profession is speaking out because to remain silent is the same as being complicit with the governmental inaction that put so many of us at risk, got so many patients sick, and led to so many deaths.



Carol Roe, a registered nurse and attorney, is the former mayor of Cleveland Heights.

As nurses, we are grounded in a code of ethics that, among other values, stresses advocacy for patients and doing so with compassion and according to best scientific practices. We wear masks, use personal protective equipment, and keep social distance in our daily practice because science proves these measures will curtail the spread of COVID-19. When the present administration sows doubt about the value of wearing masks and engaging in social distancing, we as nurses can confidently say they are choosing the wrong path for our national well-being. When the president puts his own staff at risk and spreads the coronavirus in his politically motivated [motorcade](#) and return to the White House, we nurses say he is choosing

the wrong path. When the president attempts to thwart the effort of the Food and Drug Administration and pharmaceutical companies guidelines to develop safe vaccines, we nurses say it's wrong.

Nurses are compassionate caregivers, often at patients' bedsides from birth to death. We hold the hands of those dying from COVID-19. We use cellphones to bring loved ones to failing patients' bedsides so they can say "I love you" one more time. Nurses treat patients' physical and emotional needs. And we do not ask the political affiliation of the people we care for, whether they support or oppose wearing masks, whether they socially distance or not. We provide care regardless. We just do it.



Registered nurse Eileen Kilbane Gordon is co-founder of the Ohio Association of Advanced Practice Nurses.

We must elect former Vice President Joe Biden this November because he will enact policies that will benefit patients and the communities we care for. His [plan for expanding the Affordable Care Act](#) will bring more access to health insurance for all, regardless of ability to pay. President Trump's efforts to get the Supreme Court to strike down the ACA in the time of a killer pandemic is not only wrong, but cruel. The mere recognition by Joe Biden and Kamala Harris that science matters, that simply wearing a mask matters, gives hope to nurses and our patients. His plan to manage the impact of the pandemic on our health, as well as our economy, will effectively take us through this terrible crisis. We urge Americans to align your Nov. 3 vote with the professionals you have always trusted. Nurses know that Biden and Harris will lead us to a healthier, safer, more compassionate future.

Carol Roe is a registered nurse, attorney, current member of the Ohio Nurses Association Board and former mayor of Cleveland Heights. Eileen Kilbane Gordon is a registered nurse, pediatric nurse practitioner, co-founder of the Ohio Association of Advanced Practice Nurses and former owner of a Northeast Ohio travel health clinic. Both are nurse activists for political and social justice and have worked together for decades on health care legislation affecting nurses and the patients they serve.