

# Nurse-Attorneys? Yes. Lawyers Are Donning Scrubs Again to Help Battle COVID-19

Multiple nurse-attorneys—dual professionals who hold licenses in the law and nursing—have paused their law practices to return to medicine during the coronavirus pandemic.

By **Angela Morris** | May 14, 2020 at 01:30 PM



Colleen Carboy, a Lewisville solo practitioner and nurse, has paused her law practice to return to nursing in a COVID-19 hospital unit in New Jersey. She's not the only nurse-attorney to do this. Courtesy photo

The news about Italy's overwhelmed hospitals flipped the switch for Texas attorney Colleen Carboy.

She couldn't sit on the sidelines and let her country's health care system fall like that, explained Carboy, a Lewisville medical-malpractice solo practitioner who paused her practice to become a nurse again after 25 years out of the field.

"Patient outcomes were being affected, due to the shortage of health care providers," said Carboy. "That really drove it home for me: If we have a similar situation in New York and New Jersey, I can make a difference."

Carboy took a six-week assignment as a COVID-19 unit nurse in a hospital in Englewood, New Jersey, where she went through the ups and downs of seeing patients recover and go home surrounded by inspiring celebrations.

But she also saw patients—sometimes, members of the same family stricken with overwhelming fear—slowly lose their battles with the virus, and die.

"It will stick with me. I'll just focus on the good stories," said Carboy, who returns home to Texas on Saturday to begin a two-week quarantine in an isolated room in her family home. "I just can't wait to get home. I can't hug my family, but I'm going to let my dogs jump all over me."



Colleen Carboy, second from left, poses with colleagues at the New Jersey hospital where she has been treating COVID-19 patients. Courtesy photo

## Call to service

In the medical-malpractice legal field, it's not uncommon for attorneys to have health care backgrounds. There's even a legal group, the American Association of Nurse Attorneys, that counts 300 members who hold dual degrees as nurses and lawyers. The association's listserv has shared stories of other members—Carboy is one—who have also paused their legal practices to don scrubs again to care for coronavirus patients.

"Nursing is in your DNA. We're called to serve," said Lorie Brown, the president-elect of the nurse-attorney association.

Brown, who works as a nurse-attorney at Brown Law Office in Indianapolis, couldn't leave her law practice to go back to nursing. But she did devote time to preparing a guide about self-care and mental health for nurses, covering things like mindfulness, meditation and yoga.

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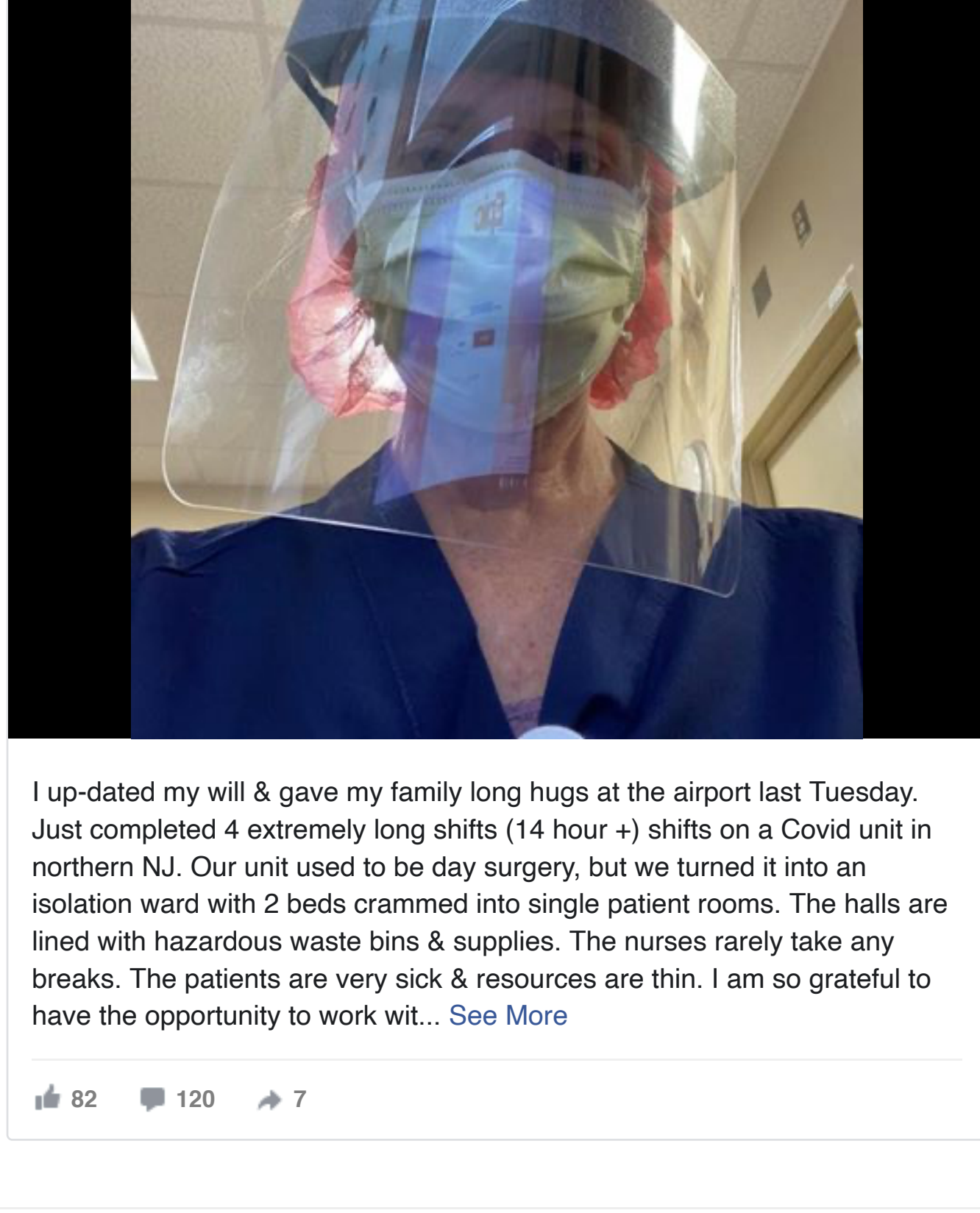
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## 'Patients are afraid'

Carboy, who earned her nursing degree in 1987 and her law degree in 1990, documented some of her journey with COVID patients on Facebook.

"These patients are afraid and lonely," she wrote on April 13. "We stay strong and positive because our patients need that right now."

## Read her post:



Dallas plaintiffs lawyer Jim Mullen also went back to nursing during the pandemic.

Mullen, an attorney at Curtis Law Group in Dallas, spent three weeks in April working overnight shifts at a New York City hospital where he cared for coronavirus patients. After a two-week quarantine, he said he returned to his law practice on Monday.

He said he felt inspired by the fact that so many nurses, doctors and other health care providers from across the nation had responded to the urgent need in New York City. They filled up three or four hotels in Manhattan and every day, 10 or 12 buses arrived to take them to their assignments in hospitals, Mullen explained.

Yet Mullen's assignment was also hard.

He worked in critical care in the emergency room. He documented his experience in videos on Instagram, discussing the shortage of personal protective equipment and hospital supplies, and warning people to stay at home so that infections wouldn't overwhelm the hospital system.

"It is sad to watch these people die, mostly because they don't have any family around them," said Mullen.

When returning home, he admitted he felt strong emotions: He hoped he'd never again experience some of the things he witnessed there. And yet, he was simultaneously filled with great respect for his peers.

"What a really amazing opportunity for me to come down here, and work alongside some of the best nurses and doctors I've ever had the opportunity to work with," Mullen said.

## Watch his video:

