

My name is Joshua Garza, I am 43 years old residing in a suburb of Houston, TX. Due to my initial hesitancy regarding the COVID vaccine I passed on a chance to obtain the vaccine in early January. Due to underlying health issues that I was aware of and treating, I was eligible for the early dose. As a result of not following through with the vaccination, I ended up contracting the virus in late January and endured a 4 month stay in the hospital resulting in a double lung transplant to save my life.

When approached about the vaccine in early January, I felt that I was adhering to all the protocols. I wore the mask when out, made sure to be socially distanced, continued washing of my hands, etc. At the time I strongly felt that I was doing everything I needed to protect myself and my family. It is a decision I have to live with for the rest of my life.

On January 28th, I started to feel ill with the usual symptoms of the coronavirus. As my condition worsened my wife and I decided to get tested on January 30th. Results were sent to us the next day, my wife was negative but I was given the dreaded results as being tested positive. My condition worsened in the following days to a point where I no longer had enough strength to walk. My oxygen levels started to drop as a result of the virus attacking my lungs. I tried to walk to the front of our house and ended up falling due to oxygen levels being so low. My wife called an ambulance to take me to the hospital immediately. I was first admitted into a hospital on February 2nd.

First hospital I was at ran the usual tests but my condition continued to get worse. After receiving results from the testing, doctors were able to determine that my lungs were hit the hardest and deteriorating at a rapid rate. After a 2 week stay and countless tests we received the news we did not want to hear. The doctors had done everything they could have done and my condition was too far gone to fix. This hospital had given up on me and I was not ready to give up. I reached out to my family and explained the situation and said my final goodbyes as I did not know of what was to come or how long I had to live. Toughest call I had to make was to my 12 year old son and let him know of my situation. After that call I decided that I was not ready to give up. My wife and I decided that in order to continue fighting I would have to transfer to a different hospital. This was February 13th.

On February 14th I was able to secure a bed at Houston Methodist hospital - Medical Center. After being transferred the Methodist staff started testing immediately. The doctors had the same conclusion that my lungs were being destroyed by the coronavirus but they had options for treatment not offered at the previous hospital. Moved to the ICU floor and was placed on an ECMO system to help my lungs function during this time. The ECMO system prolonged my life enough to get evaluated for a lung transplant. After evaluation it was determined that I was a candidate for transplant. I was on the ECMO system for almost 5 weeks before being approved for the transplant list. Once placed on the list I waited 3 weeks in order to find a match. Successful transplant surgery was done on April 13th. After surgery I had to start the rehab process within the Methodist network and was released from the hospital on May 27th.

While in the hospital I was faced with many uncertainties that are not controllable due to the situation. You have time in the hospital to reflect on life decisions and the outcome of each. The amount of pain I endured during this ordeal is something that I never want to replicate. If I could change my decision back in early January to go forward with the vaccination I would. We live in a country where you are free to make your own decisions - with respect to the coronavirus vaccine I would ask our fellow Americans who are on the fence to think of not only yourself but also your family and community to avoid the pain and suffering many families have to go through as many have lost loved ones due to COVID 19. I have a second chance at life and I intend to share my story as much as I can to help someone save their life.

Joshua Garza