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## Coronavirus Live Updates

THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

# 'Mourning In Isolation': Chaplain Tries To Comfort Families Of COVID-19 Patients

April 10, 2020 · 5:00 AM ET

Heard on Morning Edition



DAVID GREENE

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A medical worker transports a patient at Mount Sinai on Wednesday in New York, during a week that saw a record number of coronavirus deaths.

*Mary Altaffer/AP*

During the coronavirus pandemic, many hospitals have restricted family visits because the risk of infection is just too high.

For many families, the only connection they have to a loved one in their final moments in the ICU is through a hospital chaplain.

As New York City experiences a staggering loss of life this week, Rocky Walker, a chaplain at Mount Sinai Hospital in Manhattan, has been working outside the shut doors of patient rooms. There, while on the phone or video chat with a patient's family member, he'll describe what he's seeing in the room.

In the final stages of the disease, he says, the patient is incapacitated, Walker says. So, he's there more for the family.

"I spend a lot of time trying to make sense of things that just don't make sense: The fact that you can't be next to your loved one, the fact that so many of our patients that are dying — their family members are recovering from COVID, so they're actually mourning in isolation because no one can be around them," Walker, speaking from Mount Sinai's intensive care unit, told *Morning Edition*.

The following are excerpted from the interview, which you can listen to in full at the audio link above.

### **On his job as a hospital chaplain**

How do I help a father tell his children, his young children, their mother isn't coming back and walking them through that? How do I help a nurse who is new to nursing and has walked into all this death and it's nothing that she had ever imagined? ...This is very hard because this is personal. No patient is a number. And this is a very good hospital. ... Our patients usually live. And to have so many of our patients not making it — it's even hard on the seasoned doctors.

### **On how he's using video chat to help families connect with their dying loved ones**

We try to get the cameras in the rooms with the family members. But that itself is a big logistical undertaking and it literally pulls the nursing staff away from critical duties. So we can only do that on a limited basis. I have more time than anyone else on the medical team, so I have personally taken my phone that you're calling me on and I will stand outside the door and I will FaceTime with families and just let them look. That's better than nothing.

### **On finding comfort in a passage from Psalm 91**

The part that I find the most comforting is when it says that "This plague will not come near you. His angels will bear you up so that you don't even dash your foot against a stone." And I'm living that. I'm not reading that, I'm living that. And it's both beautiful, and it's also difficult. It's like, "Wow, God, thank you for protecting me." But why me? ... I'm thankful, but my heart just cries for those who are falling to this thing. My heart cries for it.

*Ashley Westerman produced this story for broadcast. Emma Bowman adapted it for the Web.*

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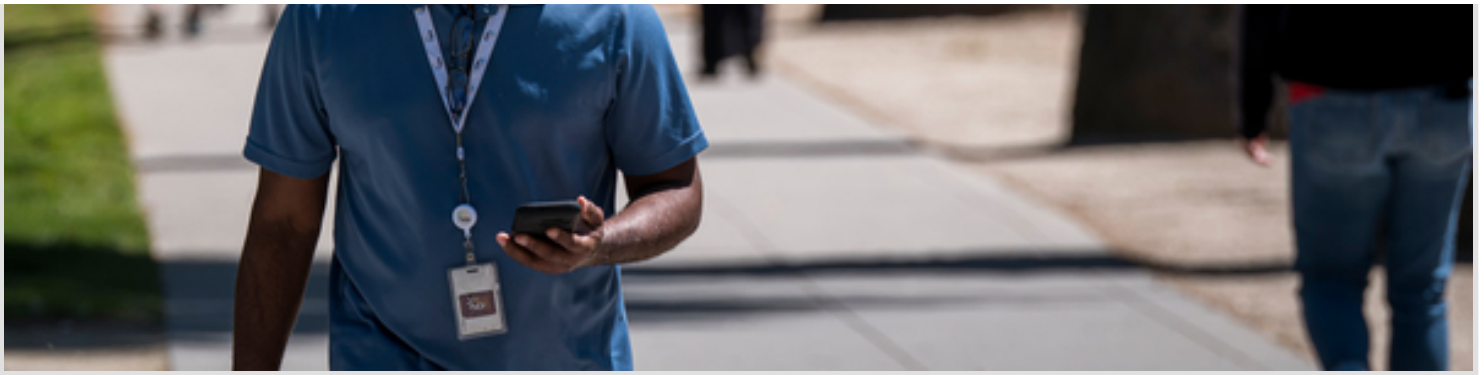


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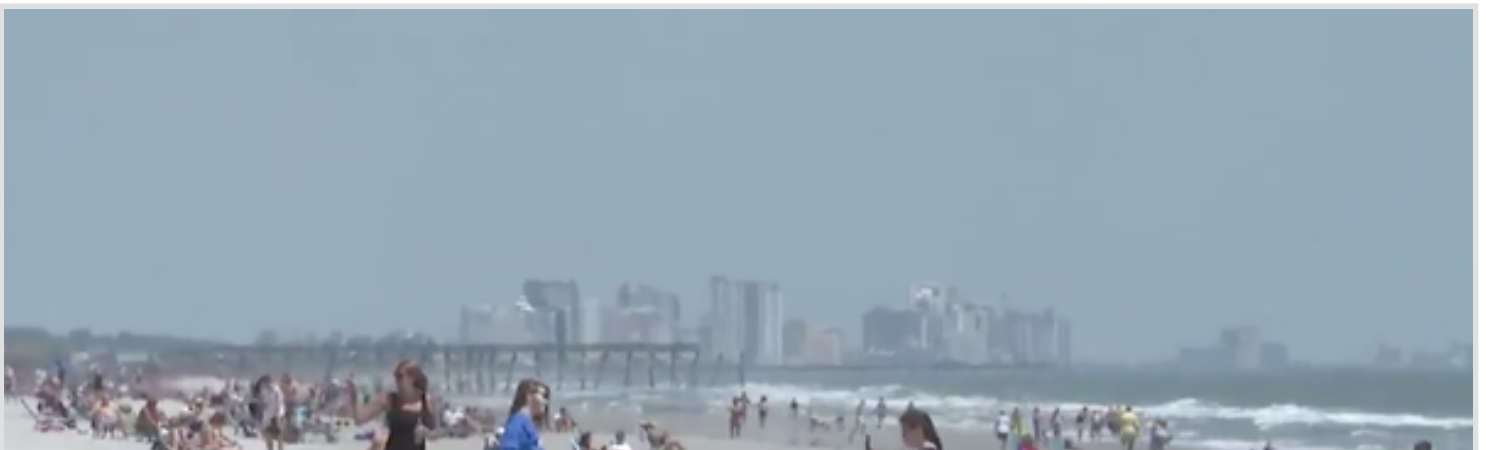
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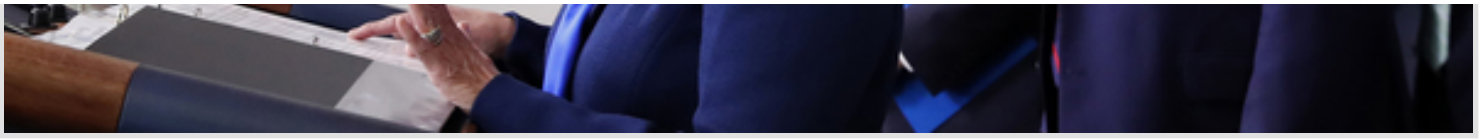


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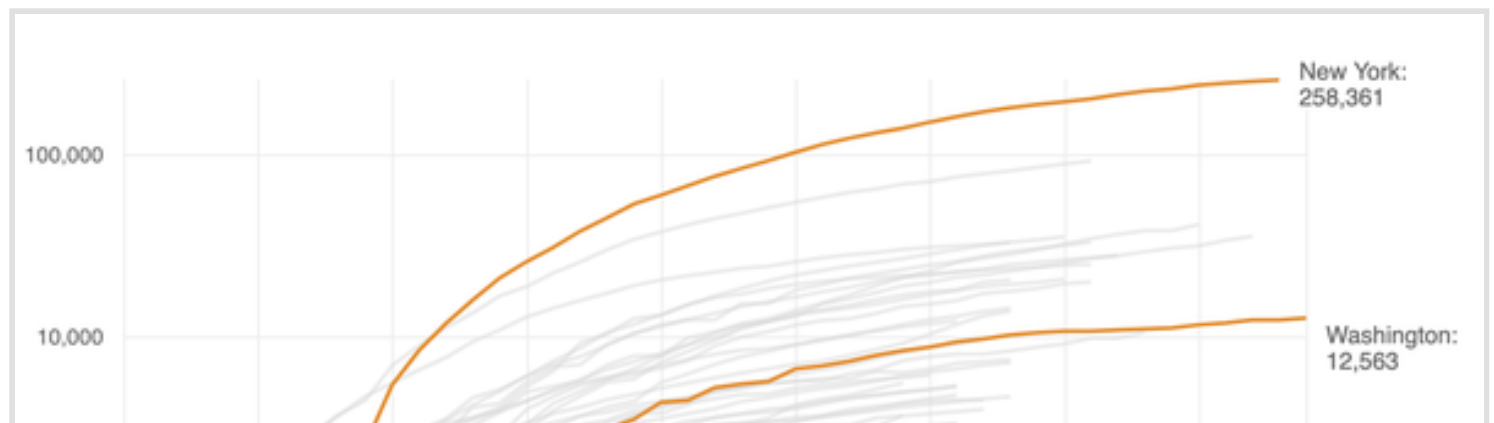


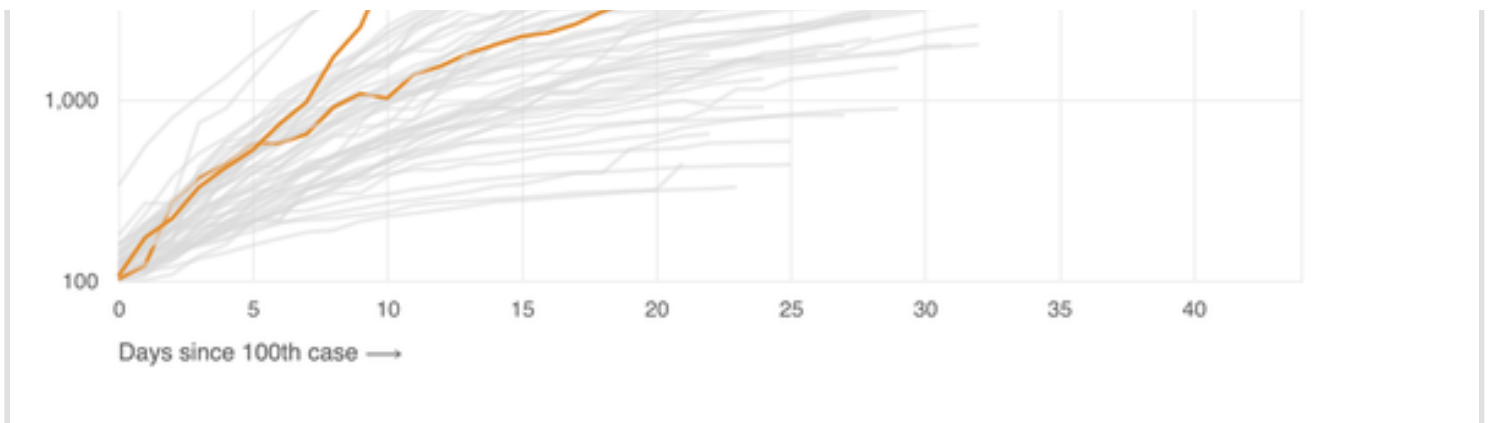


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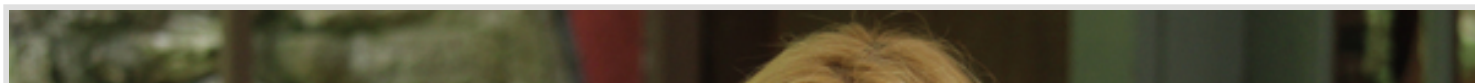
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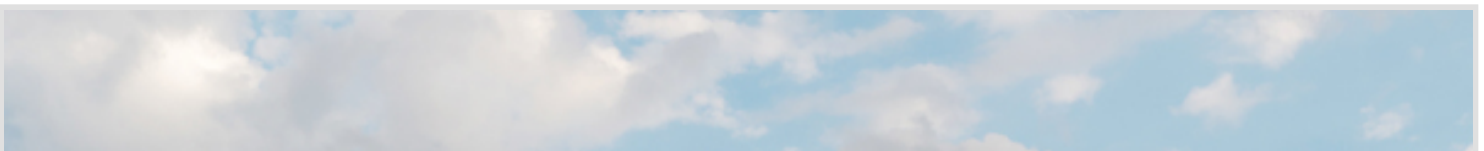
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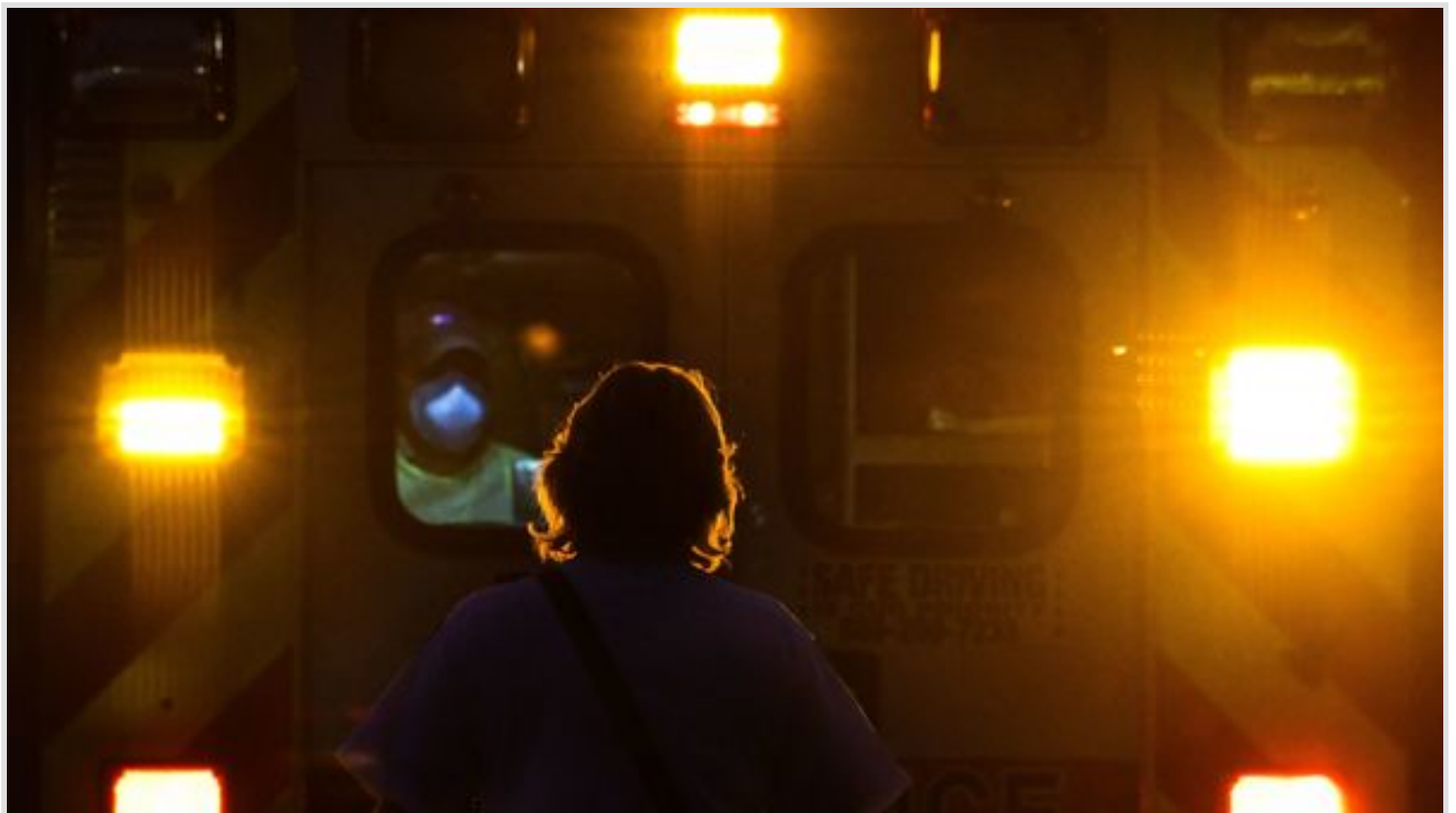
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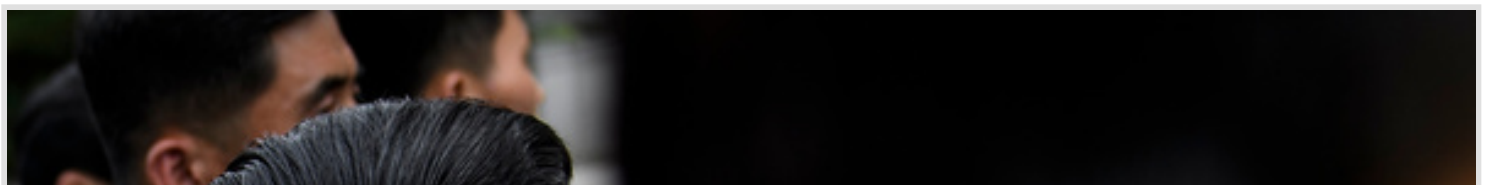




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