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NEWS FROM THEDACARE®
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MARQUETTE COUNTY MAN THANKS THEDACARE TEAM FOR COORDINATED COVID-19 CARE

“I Would Not Be Here Without the Caregivers; I’m So Grateful”

NEENAH, Wis. – The last day Carey Koats remembers was near the end of January 2021. He and his wife had just tested positive for COVID-19. His wife was feeling okay, Carey was not.

“At first, he was having typical symptoms of COVID-19 – a fever, congestion and feeling tired,” recalled Candy, his wife. “I knew it had become serious when he started having trouble breathing. That’s when I called the ambulance.”

It was also the day their lives changed. Carey, a 46-year-old correctional officer, would be in the hospital for months, spending weeks on a ventilator. He was taken to ThedaCare Medical Center-Berlin, and then moved to ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Neenah.

“He continued to decline,” said Candy. “On January 30, the nurses and doctors intubated Carey. Before they did that, I was allowed one visit. I told him I loved him, and he would be okay. I was so grateful for that time with him.”

The severe illness was difficult for Carey’s family. Nurses and doctors would call and provide updates on Carey’s progress. Candy continued to stay strong, only allowing positivity and hope to surround her husband.

“I just told him that he was going to make it,” she recalled. “I let him know that he would come home, that he would beat this.”

Carey was intubated for weeks. Throughout the long days, the team became an extension of the family.

“I called twice a day,” said Candy. “All of the teams were amazing. My husband is here today because of the doctors and nurses who cared for him throughout his journey. I thank God for them.”

A Turning Point

It was hope that Candy says helped Carey recover. After weeks in the hospital, Carey made progress. He was taken off of the ventilator and began to regain his strength.

“We knew it would not be easy,” said Candy. “This was going to take time. He needed to learn how to walk, talk and use his arms again. He beat COVID, and had a long road ahead of him.”

Carey was transferred to a rehabilitation facility, and then eventually Juliette Manor in Berlin. He began physical and occupational therapy, and served as an inspiration for others. On May 1, 2021, Carey would finally go home with a parade of friends, neighbors, first responders and community members.

“It was incredible to see such a special moment,” said Candy. “We are thankful for the community’s support, prayers and well-wishes. It meant so much for our family.”



A Special Visit

After months of therapy and recovery, in August 2021, the Koats family knew it was time to say thank you. Team members on the COVID-unit at ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Neenah arranged for Carey and Candy to visit the hospital to thank the care teams that they credit with saving Carey's life.

"I would not be here without every single one of them," said Carey during the visit. "I am just so grateful to be here."

Team members who cared for Carey stopped by to say hello, and speak with the patient they continued to think about, even after he left.

"We created a relationship with the family through updates over the phone and on FaceTime," said Kristy Heckert, RN, Clinical Manager of the COVID-Unit at ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Neenah. "This is a special moment for many of us. We helped them get through the challenging times, and they helped us."

The visit also provided hope for the team.

"This is why team members do what they do," said Heckert. "We want to see patient outcomes like Carey's, we need to see miracles like this. The good stories like this keep us going."

Carey now continues to recover through rehabilitation. His family hopes their story can help others.

"If you are diagnosed with COVID, we would want people to know that they have to be strong," said Candy. "This virus is serious. We're encouraging everyone to take precautions and stop the spread."

Carey said he understands how lucky he is, and will never take that for granted.

"I have to take the good with the bad," he said. "I am here, and that is what matters."

The Koats Family would like to thank all caregivers, including:

- Dr. Andrew Maes, Urology Specialist/Surgeon at ThedaCare Medical Center-Berlin
- Sharon Ross, ThedaCare Physicians-Wild Rose
- ThedaCare Rehabilitation Teams
- Dr. Joseph Longo, Family Medicine Physician at ThedaCare Physicians-Ripon

"We want to thank every single person who has supported our family during this time," said Candy. "They are angels and we will never forget all they have done for us. We are truly grateful and blessed."

Image Captions:

Image 1: Carey Koats, a 46-year-old correctional officer, spent months in the hospital after testing positive for COVID-19.

Image 2-3: Carey continues his recovery through physical and occupational therapy.

Image 4-5: After months of therapy and recovery, in August 2021, the Koats family met with team members from the COVID-unit at ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Neenah to thank them for the care they provided.

**About ThedaCare**

For more than 110 years, ThedaCare® has been committed to improving the health and well-being of the communities it serves in Northeast and Central Wisconsin. The organization delivers care to more than 600,000 residents in 17 counties and employs approximately 7,000 health care professionals. ThedaCare has 180 points of care, including seven hospitals. As an organization committed to being a leader in Population Health, team members are dedicated to empowering people to live their unique best lives. ThedaCare also partners with communities to understand needs, finding solutions together, and encouraging health awareness and action. ThedaCare is the first in Wisconsin to be a Mayo Clinic Care Network Member, giving specialists the ability to consult with Mayo Clinic experts on a patient's care. ThedaCare is a not-for-profit health system with a level II trauma center, comprehensive cancer treatment, stroke and cardiac programs, as well as primary care.

For more information, visit thedacare.org or follow ThedaCare on social media. Members of the media should call Cassandra Wallace, Public and Media Relations Consultant at 920.442.0328 or the ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Neenah switchboard at 920.729.3100 and ask for the marketing person on call.

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