

## Scenario 17 – Covid at home with precautions

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First it was her voice – shimmering through *Summertime*. Then her cooking – oh the risottos, the curries... And after forty years of marriage, her voice still shines and her curries still sting. You've always been a team, working in the shop together until you decided to call it a day a few years ago; and you've always shared a belief in working hard and staying positive. Your two children have done well for themselves, your son now in a good job in IT in Germany, and your daughter, having caught a love of cooking from her mum, becoming a chef in a fancy French restaurant. She was always a plump child, but all that cream and butter has made her pile on the weight, and she was recently diagnosed with diabetes.

A few weeks before lockdown, she split up with her partner and has been camping out in the spare room. Once the restaurant had to close, she transferred her skills with soufflés and gratins to your little kitchen, though lately your wife has confided that the dishes taste rather bland.

To keep your spirits up during lockdown, you all spend many hours singing your favourite showtunes, with you doing a passable job of accompanying them on the upright piano. After one such evening, your wife complains of feeling very tired and goes to bed early. The next morning she is running a temperature, but assures you that it's nothing and she'll be as right as rain soon enough. She's normally right about these things, but when your son happens to phone a few minutes later, he is concerned, and tells you in no uncertain terms that you must call the doctor.

"But she doesn't have a cough", you say.

"Call him anyway!"

He also urges you to move out of your bedroom and to avoid spending time with your wife. Just in case. But where can you sleep? There's only a small sofa in the living room that's not long enough for you to stretch out on.

You say you'll think about it, but when you put the phone down, it all feels too dramatic. Your son has always been over-anxious. It's probably not Covid. But you do call the GP who arranges for a test.

'Just in case', your son had said. You talk to your wife.

"Even if it's just flu," she says, "or a cold, I don't want you to catch it. But I'm sure it's nothing."

You talk to your daughter. Your daughter is not anxious like your son, but even she insists that you sleep in the spare room, and she will sleep on the sofa. It's not easy to resist the urge to be with your wife, to mop her brow and plump up the pillows so she can sit up, which seems to help with her breathing. But you do resist – most of the time. You give her a little bell so that she can summon you if necessary. She doesn't ring it often, and when she does, you tie a scarf around your nose and mouth when you go in. Just in case. At the urging of your son, you've ordered masks online, but they don't arrive for four days.

It is Covid. The GP says he'll arrange for community nurses to come round if necessary, and to contact him if things get worse. Your son and daughter have a long phone conversation, after which she says she really should move out, considering that she is overweight and has diabetes. A cousin who lives nearby offers to put her up, so she decamps that day. She still makes broths and simple stews for you and your wife which she leaves at the door.

The next few days are a bit of a blur, but you are careful about everything you do – for example, disinfecting the bathroom after each use and leaving windows slightly open for ventilation. Sometimes you stand outside the bedroom door and sing *Summertime* and *Send in the Clowns* and end up in fits of giggles because it sounds so terrible.

When your wife takes a turn for the worse, your GP says she should go to the hospital. You are both horrified. You're sure that she'll recover, because she's always been a strong woman, but if the worst comes to the worst, you want to be there with her. And that won't be allowed. There's no way you can be separated. So you both say no. The GP says he respects your decision but urges you to reconsider, adding that he'll visit tomorrow. He leaves a box of medication and instructs you how to administer each drug.

As soon as he's gone, you feel weak at the knees contemplating whether you'll be able to remember everything he's said about the medication and how to judge when to phone for help. But the community nurses who come in are very kind and reassuring, and do a sterling job in keeping your wife relatively comfortable. After two more days, your wife shows signs of improvement, but you develop a cough.

A few days later the GP recommends that you go into hospital because of your increasing breathlessness. Your son and daughter urge you to go, saying that you'll be well looked after, and anyway who's going to look after you at home? The hospital ward is clean and bright, and it's lovely to lie in fresh, crisp sheets. You will get through this, you think. You will go home. Stay positive.

It's hard. It's hard to think at all. You sleep. You dream.

*Summertime – "...and the living is easy ... there's nothing can harm you..."*

The consultant is smiling. She says she's pleased with your improvement, that your exposure to the virus must have been relatively small because you'd been careful, and that you are being discharged.

When you arrive home, your wife and daughter greet you at the door, beaming.