# Maureen J. Merges, RN, MSN, ANP, CIC, Infection Control Nurse

Maureen J. Merges, RN, MSN, ANP, CIC, is an Infection Control Nurseat James J. Peters VA Medical Center in the Bronx, New York City. She was nominated for the American Academy of Nursing’s *Covid-19 Courage Award in Leadership.*  Ms. Merges is an Advanced Practice nurse and was the sole Infection Control Nurse at the Medical Center during the Covid-19 pandemic’s surge. James J. Peters VA is located in the heart of New York City and cares for a large, vulnerable population of veterans.  The area has the highest incidence of diabetes mellitus in the nation as well as other socio-economic and medical co-morbidities.  The area was the epicenter of the Spring Surge of Covid-19 in the U.S.A.

Maureen Merges has devoted her career to the care of veterans and has been in the leadership role of Infection Control Nurse since 2007.  She was the sole Infection Control Nurse when the pandemic arrived.  Since late winter, 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit New York Maureen Merges has been on the front lines leading the Infection Control Task Force responding to the crisis.  In early March, the hospital was confronted by a sudden surge of patients.  Nationally, resources including testing for the virus, supplies, and a response team were a challenge.  The hospital experienced an immediate surge in patients positive for the virus.  Many were critically ill, requiring intensive care, support on ventilators, multiple IV drips, and resources. By April, New York City experienced the highest rate of Covid-19 infections and deaths, as the epicenter of the global pandemic.

Ms. Merges immediately went into action, leading the Infection Control Task Force. She worked tirelessly, 7 days a week, to address the crisis.  Ms. Merges was front and center as the hospital responded by creating Hot Triage for patients and staff; setting up testing and triage; doing major environmental changes, including creation of numerous negative pressure rooms; and addressing both patients and staff who got sick from the COVID virus.  Maureen was ever present.  She rounded on every unit.  With the complexities of using Protective Personal Equipment (PPE), Ms. Merges worked on the front lines to teach and role model PPE use.  She advocated for needed supplies and resources.  Even when at home, she was responsive to all needs.

Maureen understood the growing risks of the virus and put into place numerous programs and led projects to treat and mitigate the pandemic.  She was constantly rounding to all areas of the hospital, making adjustments to PPE use and requirements, listening to staff, and working to make the environment for staff and patients.  Staff testing became a challenge.  Maureen personally reviewed and communicated all testing results to staff and providers, into the late hours of the night.

As the sole Infection Control Nurse, Ms. Merges did so much.  Bringing her clinical nursing and infection control expertise, she enabled the hospital to control and manage the pandemic.  In addition to working with the hospital’s interprofessional staff, Ms. Merges worked with emergency management staff, and temporary staff that came from around the country to assist during the crisis.  Her expertise, organization, communication, and example made all the difference.  Although the pandemic is not over, Maureen’s contributions have created a safe and caring evidence-based environment of care.  Maureen Merges is an unsung hero who truly deserves the AAN’s Courage Award for leading the nursing Infection Control response to Covid-19.  She made the difference!