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THREAD: I just spent 3 days with frontline workers at hospitals in a part of Appalachia where hospitalizations have more than doubled in the last month. But hospital staff say many in their hard-hit communities still don't believe COVID is real. Misinformation is rampant.

One nurse told me stories of otherwise healthy 30 year-olds coming in short of breath and not understanding why. She tries showing them chest x-rays and explaining evidence of the disease, but often they don't believe they have COVID until they're in critical condition.

Another nurse told me some come in severely sick with COVID, but when they test positive they blame the hospital for giving it to them. There's a popular conspiracy theory that hospitals are benefitting financially from COVID. But in fact, many are struggling to stay afloat.

Ultimately, politicization and misinformation around COVID are having tragic real-world consequences. People are dying because they don't seek medical care when they begin having symptoms. They don't believe they're sick. And by the time they get to the hospital it's too late.

This is heartbreaking for families and also for health workers who often treat people they know personally in these small, tight-knit communities. They are watching neighbors die because they were told by leaders they trust that this virus is a hoax.

These frontline workers see multiple deaths during a single shift...then go out into a world where people downplay the virus, say masks infringe on their civil liberties, and tell stories of big gatherings. And they know they will make more calls to the funeral home tomorrow.

Huge thank you to @BalladHealth staff for taking the time to talk to me about your experiences. It's not easy. But what you do every day is much harder. Your resilience is staggering.