

From: Claudine Michele Strazza [mailto:]
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To: OS OPHS CFSAC (HHS/OPHS)
Subject: CFSAC

cfsac@hhs.gov

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome has adversely affected my life in more ways that I can describe. I have not been able to work or bring in any cash to my household for about 5 years now. I usually have a low-grade fever, swollen lymph nodes, and flu-like symptoms, parasthesia, pain, brain fog, cognitive problems, among other symptoms. I cannot do too much in any given time or else I will suffer post-exertional malaise. I am on a medication for pain that causes side-effects such as nausea, dizziness, sleepiness, and others. My activities of daily living are very limited. This illness has drastically reduced any socializing that I may have been able to do, which includes even going to see a movie because I cannot bear the pain of having to sit in the seats, not to mention because of my dysfunctional immune system, I am highly susceptible to any infections that people may be carrying. Recently, New York City has had a concentration of swine flu outbreak. This is very worrisome to me, causing me to stay indoors more because of the ramifications of possible exposure to it. If I am exposed to the virus, with my compromised immune function, I am more likely to succumb to it. My short term memory has been really affected, as well as my recall of everyday words. Many times I have to motion what I mean rather than saying it, which to say the least, is extremely frustrating and embarrassing. I very rarely see family or friends, which makes a very lonely life. Oftentimes, the symptoms are so bad that leaving my apartment is out of the question, and even getting out of bed is nearly an impossibility. I cannot stress enough that this is not an illness of laziness or just "I'm too tired." Fatigue is a real component, but it is not nearly the only one. Many people don't understand; they deride and/or ridicule those of us with this awful sickness. The cruelest joke of all on us is that we can look very "normal," not sick at all. Let us not forget that not long ago, people with Multiple Sclerosis were diagnosed with "hysterical paralysis." Those of us with CFS are suffering the same scorn.

Claudine Michele Strazza

"The best thing to hold onto in life is each other." - Audrey Hepburn