

Hello, my name is Kendal, I am 22 and graduated from Brandeis University a year ago with a BS in Health: Science, Society, and Policy. I am very excited to start an accelerated nursing program at NYU in September.

On 9/11 I was just a baby at 10 months old. I was at home when the towers fell, and with the exception of one week lived with my parents right where the rubble pile ended until I went to college. Although I have no memories of the day, remembering the victims and the impact was part of my upbringing. This included learning about the long-term health impacts on survivors and as I pursued my public health degree in college the WTC health registry was a standard case study in my epidemiology and seminar classes.

At the beginning of my senior year in 2021, I noticed a large lump in my throat. My whole senior year was shadowed by appointments and increasingly less ideal results until I got surgery and was diagnosed with follicular thyroid cancer. Being 20 and getting the diagnosis pulled my mortality into sharp focus. It's a truly bizarre experience to get the diagnosis that you have cancer, and then take an exam calculating the various forms of prevalence and incidence of cancer using the WTC data and realize you are one of those statistics. Even more bizarre to read the studies of firemen having increased incidence of your particular cancer after 9/11.

I have never smoked, I live a healthy lifestyle, and I don't have a family history of cancer. There's no reason at 20 I should have been dealing with a 5 cm tumor.

I am very gratefully in remission as of a year ago, but I will be on thyroid medication for the rest of my life and still have some nodes that I need to monitor. Cancer will forever have a mental and financial impact on my life. Having adequate funding and keeping enrollment open for the world trade center health fund is essential to actually fulfill the purpose of helping communities that trusted the government and returned home to build back downtown NY.

Studying health, I know that research is the fundamental first step in effective action. It is essential that a cohort studying individuals who were children and in utero during 9/11 be formed so we know how to help this population and ensure that resources like the health fund are available to them in the way that makes the most sense.

Considering the latency period of diseases like cancer, the effect of 9/11 on my generation is only just becoming noticeable in health records. Many people my age don't associate health problems with 9/11, because it is not something we have memories of or are educated about by healthcare providers. As I shared my experience I found out multiple friends have had benign but abnormal thyroid nodules in the last couple of years and some even had other friends with cancer.

This cohort is essential to help the children, now adults, affected, but also as a source of knowledge for future environmental exposures. The unique developmental factors affecting young people necessitate a unique cohort study. Not studying this population and being cognizant of the still-emerging effects of this tragedy is not an excuse to fail to provide resources.

Recruiting young people must involve spreading awareness on social media platforms as well as reaching out to parents and guardians who will have more accurate exposure info from that time. Additionally, working with health professionals to recruit people that fit the demographic would be a great first way to start.

I hope I don't come off as a sob story. The reason I'm speaking here is because I am one of over 35,000 survivors who were children and babies when 9/11 happened. "Never forget" means having an accurate picture of who the victims, first responders, volunteers, and survivors actually are. I am a survivor and I don't want a lack of activism to be the reason 35,000 people are left without academic and financial resources to understand and manage health problems they never should have had.

Thank you for your time and support of our collective future.

Kendal