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HEALTH CARE HEROES

RESPIRATORY THERAPIST BEATS COVID-19, RETURNS TO HELP OTHERS

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My Role: I mostly work with patients who have respiratory issues or trouble breathing. I help doctors with intubations, endoscopies and manage patients on mechanical ventilators. Since the pandemic started, it has been more intense. We are the first people paged when a patient is in distress. Every five minutes, there's a call overhead for a respiratory therapist to come intubate a patient in the ER. We're just running from one level to another.

We usually only have to take care of maybe 6 to 12 patients per shift, but during COVID-19, it has been 20 to 30 patients. I would normally intubate one or two patients on a normal shift, but now, I intubate about 17 to 20 people during a shift.

Tough Moments: I got to a point where it really hit me when I lost one patient. We knew that he wasn't going to make it because he had a poor prognosis, but I just cried. I cried the whole night until I came back to work. My eyes were puffy, and I just hit my breaking point.

Moment of Hope: I had one patient with high blood pressure and really high peak pressure. I said to myself that this man is not going to make it. Over a few days though, we started decreasing the peaks little by little. After a month, we were able to put him on pressure support. We then used cardiopulmonary bypass, and he did well.

We transferred him to the main floor. I was happy to hear he would be heading home. I was there cheering when he was discharged. It was really nice. That was an instance when we beat the virus. Someone went home to their family. That made me happy.



Testing Positive: I had mild symptoms – a fever and body aches for a few days and then headaches and nausea. After I tested positive, I had to stay home to complete the isolation period.

I felt guilty staying at home because I wanted to be here, but I completely understood since I didn't want to spread the virus to others. Once they gave me the OK, I was happy to come back to work. I love what I do. We get to save lives.

Managing Stress: I love the "Clap Because We Care" moment at 7 p.m. every night. I was at home one day when they clapped, and it made me feel really good and brought tears to my eyes. I felt like people cared and appreciated the work we're doing.

We are scared when we come to work, and sometimes I feel guilty when I'm not there. I feel like I should be there all the time. So, the clap makes me feel like New Yorkers appreciate us and they're telling us to keep going.

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