



# All Hands In

## Stories by: Respiratory Care Staff Mayo Clinic Health System

**Deanna:** *Where we have found joy in our work is simple to say even though we're going through hardships and losing patients in ways we had never thought would happen. I remember being there while a patient was intubated and being scared for that patient. And then, I remember the day that patient went home and remember my tears of joy. Seeing positive outcomes in an otherwise dark place is where I get my joy right now.*

*There haven't been many joyous occasions as of late. For me it's a sad situation that I'm putting a positive spin on. There was a patient that was hospitalized who had recently lost her husband to COVID, and I had the privilege of caring for her. I found joy and was privileged to be able to care for these patients at such a precious time and to be able to comfort a family member during their loss. It's not by any means a joyous occasion, but I find joy and satisfaction in being there to support the patients and their family members during difficult times.*

**John:** *Towards the beginning, a patient in critical care was intubated. It was a really difficult time for our staff and other staff caring from him. He was on a ventilator, successfully weaned and extubated, and ultimately went home. Many patients have thanked us and it's a proud moment to be recognized. I was very proud of our staff, because there were certainly a lot of staff that cared for him. The fact that we were recognized was rewarding.*

*I'm proud of our department. It's neat when you come in at 6 a.m., and some nights you could just tell had been terrible. To hear our group laughing and making fun of each other and the humor that is a part of our rapport is neat. We have a pretty resilient group. It's really shown in here. I think our younger therapists don't realize it was not always like that.*

**Deanna:** *In our darkest times is where our group is pulled together. They're my rock every day to get through it all. We all have each other's back. Morale within the group has never been higher because we're all there for each other.*

**John:** *We had significant changes in our outpatient practice and—for all practical purposes—shut it down. We were able to start back up a little bit, and then when COVID numbers really started really hitting us hard we took three of our all-patient staff and moved them to inpatient care. We had to put them on weekends. For one of them it was really a difficult time. She came to this organization to work in outpatient care, so to throw her back into the inpatient world was probably not the most desirable thing, but all three of them took it and said, "Okay, this is what we have to do right now." They routinely were looking at the schedule, identifying gaps, and volunteering to come in at different hours. One staff member has been coming in earlier than her normal shift to help staff get through the busy time of the day. It's really been neat to see our senior therapists volunteer to come in and be a resource for our young therapists.*

*I would say a big source of strength for me comes from my faith. I do guided prayer meditation. I have an app on my phone that I use on my way into work and sometimes in my car before I drive home. I'll sit, reflect, and let my mind wander. That's been healing for me.*

**Deanna:** I put more heavy things on my family. I have a couple teenagers, and they probably think I'm out of my mind when they come home from school, and I just want to hear about their day, or I want to know what makes them happy to draw from them some energy to make it through the next day. My husband is a CCU nurse, so there are times we'll go through it together, even if we're only sitting in silence and reflecting on how we made it through our days and came home to share love with our family. Some days are harder than others, but we're definitely getting there.

**John:** After a tough week with a lot of exposures, I just felt beat down. I spent the whole week as kind of lead scheduler versus being a resource for my staff. One of my employees sent me that Alicia Keys rendition of "Good Job." I don't consider myself super emotional, but I almost cried. I listened to it and just laid my phone down. My wife, Petey, was sitting there and I said, "Look at what she sent to me." Petey just looked at me, shrugged her shoulders, and said, "She knew you needed it." It was neat. I later shared that with our group, and it just epitomizes what's been going on and that staff aren't always thanked for their efforts. It taught me what just a little simple appreciation can do for somebody.

I'm the day shift supervisor of the respiratory department in Eau Claire. I have a few partners we work closely with, and we really consider ourselves a regional respiratory department across the five hospitals in northwest Wisconsin. As I've stepped back from patient care, this has been an odd time to be a leader. I find myself doing lots of different things during the day to support the staff doing their jobs and at the bedside. I do everything from delivering equipment, running, transporting patients and consulting on the difficult patients regarding synchrony or just education at the bedside that more than 20 years of experience has taught me. There are many little tips and tricks to hopefully help therapists be a little more effective at the bedside.

There are days that I go home, and I have no idea what I did, yet I was busy all day long. I hope that means I was supportive and did a decent job.

**Deanna:** There's a technical side of our job. We are respiratory care, so when there are people in distress, we are pulled in five different directions. For the Emergency department, we respond to every code, and we're there. I think we're the backbone. We work together as a team. Outside of the technical part of the job, I feel my most important part of the job right now is taking care of those patients to my best of my ability with the skills I have, but it's also just trying to be kind and calm in moments when they are terrified. That's where I build some resiliency by showing kindness and being there with a hand to hold when there's nothing else. They have no family with them and are scared. I feel right now that is one of those important aspects of my job, just to be there for that patient that is lonely, scared, and isolated. That's the best you can do.

I'm a relatively new therapist. I've been in respiratory therapy for about a year and a half. This is not what I expected when deciding to go into respiratory therapy. In addition to all the technical skills and resources that we provide, the job is being there with a hand to hold, as a listening ear, and providing anything that the patient needs where time allows.

I also think that it's important that we're there as an extension of the nurses if they need us to help do a turn or to help with anything that we can within reason. I think that's an important part of our job, to be part of a collaborative team. I think that's important during dark times to try and remain positive to try and be supportive of our employees.

*Respiratory Therapy has been ground zero for this pandemic. I couldn't be prouder of the team and how we've come together. My pride is for every aspect of the hospital and what we've done; it's amazing to me.*

*If I could give my past self-advice, I would tell myself not to take the little things for granted and that every life is a gift. Happiness is a gift, health is a gift, and we should cherish every minute we have with our families, because you don't know when it's going to be the last time you get to talk to them. Hug them as much as you can.*

**John:** *I became a grandfather in June. Unfortunately, my grandson was born in Germany. Now it is December, and we still have not met him. Our hopes are that we meet the little boy before he turns a year old, which kind of looks promising right now, but you can't take anything for granted. When my daughter-in-law became pregnant, we booked plane tickets and had plans to go to Germany. That obviously did not happen, so you can't take anything for granted.*

*I think what I would tell myself would be that everyone has a story, and every story is important and worthy of being heard. That's what I try to remember. When I look at patients, I remember everyone has a story, everyone's going through something different, and everyone has different challenges. This also pertains to my colleagues; we all have different challenges in our home lives. Everyone has a reason for the things they do, who they are, and to try and be empathetic.*

*I thought I was empathetic before, but this has really opened my eyes to the importance of empathy and putting yourself in someone else's shoes and realizing that every single person has a story, different challenges, and different life circumstances they face. We need to be sensitive to that.*

*When a patient is alone, scared, and isolated sometimes for a month in CCU they can't even see a smile, but they can sure feel us hold their hand, or put our hand on their forehead and try to comfort them when they're the scariest time of their life. I think before this pandemic that maybe fell by the wayside, or you just didn't look at it in the same way. I can't imagine being in their shoes. They need to know that somebody is there for them all the time.*

*When you see someone suffering so frequently, it develops in you this empathy and compassion that you may have taken for granted or may not have always been there, because you're just so focused on completing the tasks for that day. When you see someone alone and frightened at the bedside, without any visitors or family, that makes you a more empathetic person.*

*I'd just like to say again how proud I am of our group. This year, I never envisioned respiratory care being in the limelight. It's kind of weird that it took a pandemic to do such. It's like living in a movie, at times, especially when we were so busy.*

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Kirsten Holbrook is a respiratory therapist at Mayo Clinic Health System.

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