

Keeping Watch

The first thing I felt at the onset of this pandemic was panic and fear - especially as we knew nothing about it, and on top of that, we would be in direct face-to-face contact with the patients. We had to gather our wits as fast as possible and develop a plan of action, all following MOH protocols.

Working in the PUS Ward, our work is not only medical-related. Our patients are understandably very anxious and stressed, and they need a lot of assurance and guidance. We have to patiently explain the procedures and protocols to them and be the source of support. So, we have to keep our spirits up, be mentally strong, be vigilant and continue with the care we are entrusted with.

More than 1,000 patients have come through our PUS ward, and during the earlier days of the pandemic, we had many who tested positive. Thankfully this number has dropped significantly, especially in recent months. *In the early days, if they tested positive, we would send them to Hospital Sg Buluh. If they still needed treatment at IJN, we would keep them here and treat them accordingly in our HDU. Eventually, we started managing all our COVID patients ourselves, regardless.* Whatever the case may be, the general rule has always been that emergency cases are treated as usual, while non-emergency cases are deferred until they retest negative.

Some of the most challenging moments I experience in our ward include times when a patient falls, needs physical assistance or has chest pains, and requires emergency CPR. We have to be in full PPE when we help these patients. And yes, it is also challenging when a patient dies, especially if they have children and their families cannot be by their side.

Personally, it has also been a challenge. There is always the fear of taking back the virus to my five children. On top of that, my husband is also a first responder, working in the fire department, placing us both in high-risk jobs. I have also lost family members during these times but could not go and pay my last respects.

So yes, work during these days of a pandemic can be stressful, both mentally and physically, and it is the real test of our mettle. A lot has changed, and we have numerous added responsibilities and duties. But we have learned to be vigilant about our surroundings and our environment, which I think many of us have taken for granted, especially our health.

Also, as bad as the pandemic has been for us all, I must say that it has taught us a lot and has better prepared us to face triage situations.



Mentor Nor Farida Mhd Aripin



Every little thing matters! In critical care



SRN Siti Azila Mahamad Alias

Working in the CCU during normal situations is already very challenging as we have to be constantly on alert taking care of critical patients. During these days of the pandemic, these challenges have increased manifold.

I have been a CCU staff with IJN for about 12 years now and am used to being constantly watchful, attentive and ready to act in an instant. Never has work been more challenging than in the 18 months since we discovered COVID-19.

The CCU can handle a maximum of 22 patients. We have 7 beds for PUS and 15 for "clean" patients. Wearing a PPE is compulsory when attending to PUS patients, and this has been one of our biggest challenges.

On the first day of wearing the PPE, I was suited for eight whole hours and could not even go to the restroom as patients cannot be left unattended here. It was truly uncomfortable; I was short of breath and had limited movement and vision. Not long after, the fasting month was upon us and made it even more of a challenge as additional working hours also extended the fasting period.

In emergencies, having to wear the PPE becomes even more challenging. Additionally, we need to limit staff involvement during these emergency incidences, so we have to take on extra duties, whereas before, we could have as many as we needed.

But no matter how urgent the situation is, our protocol is that we always need to protect ourselves first, keep calm and follow the right procedures.

I am also extra careful when leaving work and going home. While my husband is not a frontliner, he also works in a hospital setting as a medical engineer. So as parents, our stress, concerns and worries are carried out of the work environment to the home scene as we need to protect our three very young children. Then there was the matter of their education with schools closed.

Through it all, we do what we have to do and continue our work and commitment in our professions. Even though there have been many struggles, I am thankful and lucky that I had the invaluable opportunity to take care of patients and learn a lot about managing this situation. I could also be of help to my family and neighbours who came to me for advice and information on COVID-19.

And while I have gotten used to the many, many SOPs, new ways of working and the PPE, to some extent, I am truly looking forward to the day we can put this all behind us.

