

Mark Badach

St. Joseph's Wayne Hospital

Wayne, NJ

Covid-19 snuck up on us slowly, but its severity and contagiousness took us by surprise. Being an anesthesiologist, I've dealt with numerous diseases that had horrible outcomes for patients, but none with such a lengthy incubation period, and therefore ease of transmission from asymptomatic carriers. Life in the OR as we knew it changed drastically. Elective surgical and endoscopy cases were cancelled, and any emergent cases were transferred to St. Joe's, Paterson. There was a constant fear of not only contracting the virus, but worse yet, unknowingly bringing it home to loved ones. In my hospital I took the responsibility of setting up a new on-call room with an adjoining anesthesia/dedicated Covid-19 storage room which would serve our PPE needs. We totally protected ourselves with PPE's for each and every case (intubations, placement of venous and arterial access) that we were called to assist on. Each day at the hospital was fairly dismal knowing that patients had terrible outcomes if intubation and mechanical ventilation became necessary. Some previously healthy individuals were significantly affected by the virus, but it appeared that the majority of the hospitalized cases that had poor outcomes were involving patients with comorbidities. One day meshed into the next with the single most important topic among my colleagues being how many patients they intubated during their shift. My only reprieve was coming home to my wife, Christine, for inspiring conversation, great home-cooked meals, long walks, working in the garden, reading, and watching TV (including Sunday Badarak for spiritual nourishment). Sleep was erratic with weird dreams only being tempered by knowing that our children were still safe. We pray, with God's grace, that this will pass.

Sarah Badach

Baystate Medical Center

Springfield, MA

There I was, reaching the end of my third year of residency. I was thinking about family vacations, graduation, and the spring/summer weather bringing times outside. COVID was on the periphery internationally, and then in our very own backyard. The first week we started talking about it in our Emergency Department felt like being back in sixth grade hearing that a terrorist attack had taken place in New York City. What was going to happen to our country? Were my loved ones going to die? Our hospital took action quickly, and the techs/nurses/residents/attendings in the ED became one unit. Each day huddles happened multiple times a day to discuss our new policies, our access to testing, who we would test, where positive patients would be triaged, what PPE was available, etc. At first it was one N95 per person, with five wears. Then we were running out. Our hospital fought hard and has kept us with enough PPE throughout for which we have all been grateful. For sick patients coming in, there would be one senior resident allowed in to treat and resuscitate. In the rest of the hospital, residents were not allowed to examine COVID patients. We were exposed to the unknown; anxieties were there, but a stronger feeling of action and teamwork pervaded and held us strong throughout. Now, almost two months later, we have gone through many changes, but also have learned A LOT about this virus, how to treat it, how to stay safe at work and how to work in a pandemic. I would not have been able to stay strong throughout this without the support of my parents.

Jeremy Badach

Cooper University Hospital

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While New York City and northern New Jersey were in the heat of battle, southern New Jersey was allowed time to prepare. There was a two-week period of anxious anticipation for the surge. First elective surgeries were cancelled, which as a surgical resident is what I normally do. With that change, the number of surgical patients in the hospital dropped precipitously allowing for treatment of anticipated COVID-19 patients. The surge started. Normal floors were converted to ICUs, ventilators were attached to patients, and new teams were formed. Surgeons, anesthesiologists, and emergency medicine physicians, and nurses volunteered to help staff the ICUs. Since there was such a reduction in surgical volume, I was allowed to volunteer in the main ICU, filled with COVID-19 patients. In this political and now pandemic environment, it can be overwhelming to work on the front lines of a deadly virus that some prominent figures and lay people have labelled as fake. It can also be frightening to be face-to-face with something that can easily be transmitted to you. The thing is, once you are in the hospital, that melts away. The people who work in hospitals chose to work there. They are uplifting and unifying. Every window and every hallway is filled with signs of encouragement made by staff to encourage their coworkers walking by or looking out a window across the hospital complex to another wing of the hospital. Everyone is adapting to help. Everyone is communicating. Everyone is understanding. Everyone is doing their best. In this pandemic environment, it can be lonely. While others may huddle together at home, we healthcare workers are afraid of infecting our families and friends. In normal times I spend around 80 hours a week with my co-residents, who have become my family. Now we are encouraged to limit time together inside and outside of the hospital which can be difficult. What has been gratifying is all the friendly greetings that my mom passes on to me from the St. Leon family. It is nice to know that we are in your thoughts and prayers.