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## Who we are behind the masks: Part 1

11/06/2020

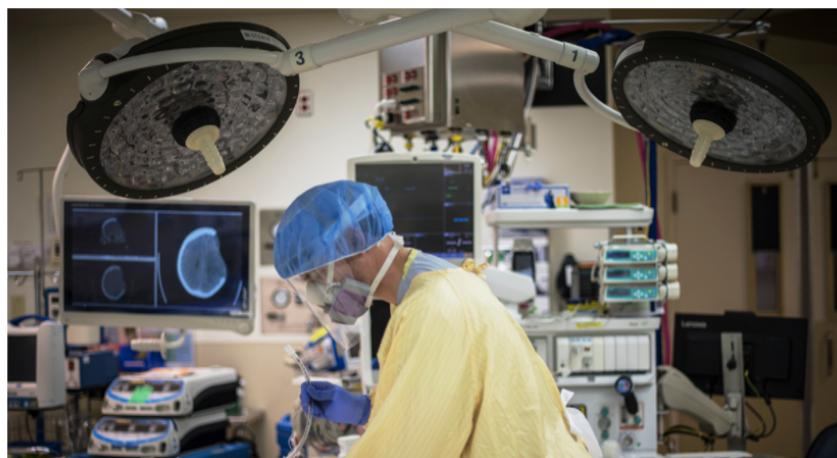


"During the early weeks of the COVID-19 crisis becoming a reality at Vancouver General Hospital, I found myself feeling overwhelmed," says anesthesiologist Dr. Cyrus McEachern. "Our work is demanding at baseline, but with the addition of a deadly contagious virus, changing protocols, and the lack of an outlet due to social isolation, it felt like a pressure cooker of stress, and I was burning out."

He turned this negative energy into positivity with a project to photograph his anesthesiologist colleagues in the hospital spliced with personal images to illustrate how work and personal lives intersect and affect each other.

"This project has created a wave of positivity and optimism in the OR," says Dr. McEachern. "In a time when all we are talking about is the pandemic, taking time to remember and celebrate the aspects of our lives that bring us joy has been an invaluable boost in morale."

We asked the VGH anesthesiologists in the portraits how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed their work and personal lives, and what these photos say about both.





### "A steady dose of fear crept in"

"My experience of the pandemic has changed over time. I recall it initially feeling very foreign, and unlikely to affect us. Fairly quickly after that, I realized it was coming here, or here already, and a steady dose of fear crept in," says Dr. Steven Moore, who went to medical school with Dr. McEachern. "Reading and trying to digest the onslaught of information coming out in those initial weeks was overwhelming (and still is). Seeing the initial patients come in to our hospital made it very real, and especially scary given that some were as young and healthy as I think I am."

Dr. Moore worried about his two and five year old children at home, but was thankful that "we live in a province and country that practice evidence-based public health".

"This project helps show how under all the PPE, we are real people with real lives and real interests outside of our work," he says. "The PPE is necessary to keep everyone safe, but unfortunately it removes a lot of the human interaction that is a part of medicine. Behind it all we're still here to help patients get through an important time in their lives, and we very much care about their wellbeing."





### Finding peace in the outdoors

"The COVID pandemic has altered virtually every part of my life," says Dr. Sandy Kisilevsky. "Initially, I found worrying about my children's mental health the most stressful part of the pandemic. But they are turning out to be quite resilient."

Dr. Kisilevsky is pictured here in the hospital and on a wine and bike tour of Sonoma County, California.

"I have two school-aged children who are now at home all day. Fortunately, they love to ride their bikes so we've been spending a lot of time outdoors on our bicycles," she says. "I feel fortunate to be in a position where I can continue to practice anesthesia and help others during an extremely difficult time."



### Courageous and altruistic colleagues

"I have a very close group of friends from medical school most of whom are practicing in the US. It is shocking to hear their stories about lack of supplies and being overwhelmed with the sheer number of COVID patients they need to care for," says Dr. Marcus Tholin. "Here in Vancouver, we are very lucky to have been ahead of the curve and therefore have not seen the same issues with PPE, ventilators, or number of patients. Having had two of these friends contract the virus and return to work after recovering has been inspiring."

He says the portrait shows a lot of how he sees himself, as a husband, father and anesthesiologist. On a boat to his family's cabin on the Sunshine Coast, it also shows his appreciation for living so close to the ocean and wilderness.

"Thinking locally about the response VGH and the anesthesia department have had has been incredible."

"When people have the same goal in mind, change can come about very quickly," he says. "Our department has adapted to this new reality, and in a very real way this has brought us closer together. I will always remember that this group of colleagues is courageous, altruistic and a group that I am proud to be part of."



### **"I remember the faces of everyone I have lost and I carry them with me"**

"When you give someone medications to put them on a ventilator, you may be the last person they see and the last voice they hear," says Dr. Andrea Brovender. "The pandemic has increased the volume of patients whose last conscious moments our group of anesthesiologists has to carry. I remember the faces of everyone I have lost, and I carry them with me."

Dr. Brovender says this photo shows both the cold sterility of the hospital and the vibrant colours of the natural world. It represents the hope of returning patients to the richness of their lives.

"We had to quickly figure out how to intubate patients with COVID-19 safely. Having to wear masks that muffle your voice, face shields that hide your facial expressions and so many other layers of PPE makes it harder to communicate and be there for them in a very human way."

### **Vote for your favourite**

The VGH and UBC Hospital Foundation and VPSA will be displaying ten of Dr. McEachern's photos in the hallway between ICU and the pre-operative care centre at VGH.

[Vote for your favourite photos here.](#) The 10 photos that receive the most votes will be the ones chosen for display.

Part two will be published next week and feature more experiences of the pandemic from anesthesiologists.

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