



Title: Wichita COVID-19 nurse tells what it's like on front lines

Author: BY TOM SHINE KMUW

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Most health experts continue to advise people to stay home to avoid catching COVID-19, or to maintain social distancing when out in public.

Lynn Hutchinson doesn't have those options. As a nurse in Ascension Via Christi's COVID Intensive Care Unit at St. Francis, he is part of the front line of health care workers dealing with the pandemic.

Hutchinson, a nurse for 33 years, was there when the first case in Wichita was diagnosed in March. And he's still there, logging 12-hour days under difficult circumstances.

"I've just always been the one that always likes to help people, I guess," Hutchinson said when asked what drew him to study nursing, first at Barton County Community College and later at [Newman University](#).

He starts his shift in the COVID ICU by slipping on layers of personal protective equipment: a gown, head covering, multiple face masks, face shield and gloves. An observer watches to make sure they

are putting on the equipment properly.

The equipment is hot and limits movement.

"And if I have a critical patient, I sometimes can't get out of there for four or five, six hours," he said. "Which means you can't drink, you can't go to the bathroom. It can be very exhausting.

"You go home and you're just emotionally and physically exhausted."

Since March, Hutchinson said he has seen all types of patients in his unit: young, old, people with no previous health problems. He said the perception that people who are dying or getting seriously ill from COVID-19 are old or perhaps weakened by another health issue is wrong.

"It doesn't discriminate," Hutchinson said of the disease. "No one's immune to this. ... We've

had patients from zero to the 90s.

"What's interesting is we've had a healthy individual with no underlying health issues that comes down with it and gets very sick with it.

"So it always kind of disturbed me when I hear people, 'Oh, you know, I won't get it because I'm a

healthy individual.' No, we've seen it."

Hutchinson said he was heartened by the community's response as hospitals began expanding their efforts to fight the pandemic. He said companies and individuals donated protective equipment like gloves, and Wichita State University manufactured face shields and disposable stethoscopes.

But as the pandemic continues into a fifth month, he fears some people aren't taking the virus as seriously as they once did.

He said seeing people in public not wearing face coverings is bothersome.

"Because I'd just like to get on the rooftop and just say, 'This is real. This affects everybody,'" he said. "Yes, people have mild cases. But I've taken care of these people that get very sick, and we've had patients who have died, which is just devastating."

The virus will end someday, although probably later than Hutchinson and other health care workers would like. Even after it's over, Hutchinson said the memories of the difficult times will linger.

"I was in there with this individual, holding this



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person's hand and knowing that they were going to pass. Telling them that their family loves them, and they're going to a better place," he said.

"You get very attached to these individuals. I still think about that individual and ... it hurts."

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