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# Medical staff on the frontline of COVID-19

ALISTAIR TAYLOR  
Campbell River Mirror

The battle against COVID-19 has mobilized Campbell River's doctors.

From family doctors to emergency room physicians, the community's medical professionals are fully engaged in the fight.

And the message from the front is clear.

"I just want everybody to know that we're all working really hard for this, that all the doctors in town have come together and really worked hard on a plan to keep people safe," said Dr. Angela Logan, chair of the board of Campbell River Division of Family Practice.

And while they do their part, they ask that you continue to do your part.

"Stay home for us. Wash your hands. Listen to (provincial health officer Dr.) Bonnie Henry," Dr. Logan said.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced doctors, like everybody else, to respond and change the way they do things. In clinics, doctors are making heavy use of the telephone to minimize face-to-face consultations, but clinics are still open and seeing people as necessary in the office and by telephone.

"If we have to see people in person, we are seeing them in person, with appropriate precautions," said Dr. Aadil



Campbell River's medical professionals are on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Campbell River Hospital is one of many fronts in the battle but the hospital and staff are prepared to welcome you into a safe and caring environment. Photo by Alistair Taylor – Campbell River Mirror

Dhansay, a Campbell River internist.

But the biggest limitation they face, in terms of seeing people in the office, is the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) on hand. Thankfully, the telephone and telecommunications can take up a lot of the slack.

"If we have to see someone in person, we will," Dr. Dhansay said, "but a lot of what we do can be done telephonically."

Clinics moved to virtual care rapidly once the COVID-19 had been declared a pandemic.

"We quite quickly had to make changes in our offices to reduce our in-person visits with patients," Dr. Logan said. "Realizing that face-to-face contact was spreading the disease, all physicians in Campbell River quite quickly, within a few days of the pandemic being announced, had switched over to virtual

care.

"It is important for everybody that they can reach out to their family doctor. We are still working and we are all still here."

No one needs to be apprehensive about engaging with the community's health resources. There does appear to be some reticence to make use of the Campbell River Hospital but there doesn't need to be.

"The hospital is still a safe

place to go," Dr. Logan said.

You may be attended by staff wearing masks and possibly goggles but that's just to keep patients and staff safe.

Dr. Dhansay also encourages people to not fear the hospital. In fact, he's concerned that people are sometimes delaying too long before going to the hospital for non-COVID issues.

"The one thing that really concerns is that people are

not presenting early enough their usual medical problems," Dr. Dhansay said.

People are hesitating to come into the hospital and consequently are coming in later in the development of their condition than they normally would and that presents problems.

"These are the people with the usual strokes, heart attacks, pneumonia not from COVID," Dr. Dhansay said. "We want them to know that they should not fear to come to the hospital with their legitimate medical concerns because of COVID."

There are procedures and systems in place to keep everybody safe.

The local medical community is kind of moving into the second phase of the pandemic. The first phase was the initial deployment and implementing procedures and plans to adapt to the situation. With those structures and approaches in place and with the public doing its part, now the focus is on staying with the task and staying on top of the virus.

"At the moment I would describe the mood more as cautiously optimistic," Dr. Dhansay said. "We also feel extremely lucky we've avoided a surge on the Island and certainly in Campbell River we've managed to avoid that surge we've seen in the eastern parts of the country as well as in North America."

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CERMAQ

# Pandemic puts nurses in challenging circumstances

MARISSA TIEL  
Campbell River Mirror

For Campbell River nurses, the one constant during the pandemic is change.

Faced with “constantly changing” directives regarding the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), the lack of supply of PPE and being reassigned to different areas of the hospital, nurses are experiencing increased anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It’s still a constantly changing world and the nurses are still experiencing a significant amount of anxiety every day as they go to work,” says Rachel Kimler, chair for the Pacific Rim region of the BC Nurses Union (BCNU).

A registered nurse in Nanaimo, Kimler represents BCNU members on Vancouver Island north of the Malahat. While she’s not

working bedside, she hears from bedside nurses about what it’s like working right now.

Kimler says that morale is varied across the region. It’s not been soaring since the new hospital opened in Campbell River.

“I wouldn’t say morale is great, because it hasn’t been great for two years,” she says. “But in light of the latest pandemic issues, it’s surprisingly good. But it’s still not good.”

Early on in the pandemic, nurses were faced with constantly changing directives.

“It used to be that the directives would almost feel like they were changing hourly,” says Kimler. “Now, you can settle in a little bit more.”

In Campbell River, Kimler highlighted the efforts of the hospital’s in-patient units’ manager, who she says “has been extremely supportive and communicative with her

staff.”

“She’s a real advocate for her frontline staff,” says Kimler. “She’s been doing the best she can in a constantly changing world to give good direction.”

At the beginning of the pandemic, many health-care workers were fearful of bringing the virus back home to their loved ones.

“I know a lot of nurses had very big decisions to make,” says Kimler. “Do they find separate homes, separate housing so that they can separate themselves from their families and not increase the risk of exposure for their family members?”

Two months in, people are finding they haven’t been able to keep the physical distance from their loved ones they had hoped for, says Kimler. But now, into the eighth week of the pandemic, they are settling into new routines.

“I think people have settled

into taking precautions in their home, things like showering the minute they walk in the door, or as they leave the hospital; changing out of their scrubs at the hospital and not travelling home in those scrubs; putting them immediately in a brown paper bag and putting them immediately into the wash.”

While the numbers haven’t been as high on Vancouver Island as officials were preparing for, nurses are still anxious about bringing the virus home, especially since some of their usual supplies of PPE have dried up, replaced by alternatives.

“We have run out of certain pieces of standard equipment and we’re seeing other equipment substituted into its place that is significantly lacking in its quality,” says Kimler. “This raises questions and concerns and nurses are again fearful for their own personal health, that of their co-workers, and

are they going to be taking something home to their families?”

Hospitals are seeing new gowns, and while Kimler has only seen pictures of them, she’s heard them likened to a “cheap dollar store tablecloth.” At least one of the North Island hospitals is using a gown that’s “completely open-backed,” she says and doesn’t provide full coverage. She’s also heard about one nurse who donned a procedural mask and “literally felt like she was inhaling fibres” after procedural masks were sourced from other suppliers after the standard one ran out.

Though there have been some challenges, there’s also been plenty of innovation.

Some community members have 3-D printed ear-saver bands to protect the skin behind healthcare workers’ ears that is breaking from near-constant mask-wear.

Those community efforts,

including scrub caps, hearts in windows and the nightly 7 o’clock cheering have buoyed spirits. But it’s hard for Kimler to put into words exactly how it makes her and other nurses feel.

“I know that it brings a swell of pride in the nurses. They feel supported by the community,” she says before pausing a beat, then another. “I’m sorry. I’m really at a loss of how to articulate the feeling that it invokes. It brings sort of warmth to the nurse, knowing that there are people out there doing what they can to help.”

Kimler thanked those following Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry’s directives and said we’re all in this together.

“These measures that we’re taking have been tough on everybody, but ultimately, they are short-term measures and we’ll come through this together if we continue to follow the directives.”

## Doctors urge everyone to keep doing their part to fight COVID-19

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It’s almost like we’ve won the lottery.”

There is a sense of relief, he said, but, he acknowledges that there are a lot of big steps ahead.

“This is a marathon, not a sprint,” Dr. Dhansay said.

Dr. Logan agrees that now that procedures and practices are in play, everyone is

taking a deep breath. The changes that have been made have had a positive impact. However, she also worries about the possibility of a second wave, which some have predicted could hit in the fall. So it’s not the time to stop taking proper precautions.

“It’s important to do what Bonnie Henry tells us to do,”

she said.

Needless to say, Dr. Henry is as highly revered in the medical profession as she is in the community at large.

But the pandemic impacts the medical community on a personal basis too. Doctors care about their patients, they want to see them avoid COVID-19 infection and are happy that compliance is

so high. But physicians also have families and children at home and there’s a level of anxiety about that for doctors as well. They’ve gone through the same changes that everyone else has gone through.

Both doctors Logan and Dhansay say they are cheered by the demonstrations of support people in

the community are making, like the banging of pots and pans at 7 p.m. and the many people driving by with signs.

“It’s lovely to hear the cheers,” Dr. Logan said. “It’s really, really helpful.”

Dr. Dhansay agrees but adds, while you’re supporting the doctors and nurses and other medical practitioners,

spare a thought for the less fortunate in the community.

For now, the message is to stay strong and help the fight by staying home, washing your hands and keeping your distance.

The battle against COVID-19 continues but we will come out of it eventually.

“We will get through this,” Dr. Logan said.



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