

Thank a nurse

by BRIAN LOCKHART

One of the on-line forums I frequent and contribute to on a regular basis, posed the question: 'Who is your hero?'

A reply came from one person who posted a photo of his wife. In the photo, she is sitting at a kitchen table eating a sandwich. Her hair is pulled back in a ponytail, and the photo was taken from the side and slightly behind. She is wearing the scrub type uniform worn by many hospital personnel. She appears tired, and maybe even slightly defeated as she sits there alone having a sandwich for dinner in a dim light.

The poster explains that this is his wife and she has just returned from her job as a stroke nurse at the local hospital where she completed a 14-hour shift. She will have a few hours of rest before returning to the hospital for her next shift.

She is his 'hero', he explained, because she takes care of people during stressful times, works long hours, and never complains. She is dedicated to her job.

Our hospitals are currently going into crisis mode on some levels as staff shortages and a larger volume of patients are overwhelming some of our health care centres.

It seems to have started with the pandemic when ICU beds were full and hospitals started taking criticism for things like having patients in the hallway rather than in a room.

I've been that patient. I was moved from a glass-enclosed patient observation room where they kept an eye on me to make sure I didn't have internal injuries or brain trauma, to a hallway where I was told to expect to be there for a while as they were trying to find a room for me.

I didn't care. I was semi-conscious and couldn't move. It's not like I wanted to get up and practice my tap dancing routine to pass the time. So, I was laying like a sack of potatoes in a hallway rather than a room for a few hours - big deal.

Hospitals are designed to serve a certain size population. A sudden surge in illness will indeed mean more people paying a visit to an emergency room.

A hospital is a complex place. Everyone there has an important job and it must be done to keep things working and make sure patients get the best of care, and hopefully are made well enough to go home.

From the people on the custodial staff who clean up the mess and sanitize the hallways and make sure the building's infrastructure is working properly to those who prepare the food are important.

If one of those departments fails to do its job properly, you're going to have a big problem.

However, it is the nursing staff who bear the brunt of caring for patients, and quite often they are not given enough credit for doing a difficult job, and for the knowledge they have when it comes to caring for patients.

I once interviewed a triage nurse who had an incredible insight when it came to patients visiting the emergency room. After 30 years on the job, she could tell almost a glance and when hearing symptoms, what needed to be done and if a seemingly mild complaint could actually be something serious. Her experience saved a lot of people from having more complex issues, and got them in for treatment right away.

Our nurses have been overloaded with work over the past couple of years, and many have burned out and decided to quit, putting more pressure on those that remain.

I can understand the burn-out. When you're in nursing, you are dealing with the sick, the injured, and the dying on a daily basis. It must place a heavy strain on your mental wellbeing.

During my five-day hospital stay, I was constantly visited by nurses who poked me with needles, drew my blood, asked for urine samples, and took a blood pressure reading and checked my O2 levels.

Every single nurse who came into my room did so with a smile on their face and a positive attitude.

I know that to them, I was probably just "motorcycle accident guy in room 6," and among many patients they were looking after. However, that positive attitude went a long way when it came to making me feel better about my situation.

I know I probably didn't show it at the time, but I was grateful to have such a dedicated staff looking after me at a time when I was like a sack of cement in a hospital bed, unable to even sit up.

Nurses are the backbone and strength of our medical system.

If you want to thank someone for their service to our communities, take a moment to thank a nurse.