

Newsmaker: Cohasset nurse recognized for work in South Shore Hospital ICU

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John Whitehouse works as a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) at South Shore Hospital in Weymouth. Greg Derr/The Patriot Ledger

Name: John Whitehouse

Age: 42

Hometown: Cohasset

In the news: Whitehouse is a certified registered nurse anesthetist at South Shore Hospital who was honored by the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists for his dedication and service during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now you know: Whitehouse has two daughters who are 10 and 7 years old.

His story: John Whitehouse has been working at South Shore Hospital alongside pediatric anesthesiologists as a certified registered nurse anesthetist for seven years, mainly in the operating room. When the pandemic hit, his job changed dramatically.

At the start of the first wave of the pandemic, Whitehouse was no longer in the operating room and instead found himself working in intensive care. While in the ICU, Whitehouse said he responded to emergencies, intubated patients, placed invasive lines and supported doctors and nurses.

"It was a pretty traumatic experience," Whitehouse said. "When we first went up there, we didn't know how well any of the PPE, the protective equipment, was going to work. We kind of assumed we would all get sick. That was our feeling. It was really scary. People just didn't know much about COVID."

Whitehouse typically works a 12-hour shift, and usually during the day, but during the first wave of the pandemic he was helping to provide 24-hour coverage in the ICU.

He said many of his fellow registered nurse anesthetists "stepped up" and did the right thing by helping in the ICU during that time full of unknowns.

When the second wave hit, Whitehouse said he continued to find himself outside the operating room. Although he said it's a challenging role, it's something he wants to do to help the rest of the health care providers at South Shore Hospital.

Not knowing what's going to come next is stressful, he said, and seeing people from his own community extremely sick and dying from COVID-19 is "beyond horrible."

Whitehouse said he went from seeing "healthy, happy kids" all day to seeing a high percentage of patients not survive, which he called a shock to all the doctors and nurses in the ICU.



John Whitehouse, right, works as a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) at South Shore Hospital in Weymouth.
Courtesy Of John Whitehouse

Whitehouse said the atmosphere in the ICU is better, but staff members are still tired.

"No one recovered even from the first wave," Whitehouse said. "Just seeing so much death and seeing people do so poorly ... people are just really tired. "

Although the past year has been full of trauma and stress, Whitehouse said he really enjoys his job. He gets to quell the fears of the kids and joke around with them to reduce their anxiety.

"I do a lot of the pediatric anesthesia here, which I find particularly rewarding," Whitehouse said. "I have two daughters myself, so working with kids and parents that are scared before surgeries (is) kind of super-rewarding."

In regard to COVID-19, Whitehouse said he wants to echo what others have said: Be kind to one another during "these crazy times."