

Enterprise Story

Healthcare veterans and newbies across the country had to make crucial career-life changes when the coronavirus pandemic turned their work lives upside down.

Michael Campagni, 60, a 30-year anesthesiologist from Dublin, Ohio, witnessed first-hand the changes that were made to accommodate the virus.

Before the pandemic, Campagni would arrive at his assigned hospital at around 6:45 in the morning. He would have reviewed the day's schedule one day prior so that he knew exactly what surgeries would take place.

By 7 a.m., Campagni would begin setting up for the surgical cases and prepping his equipment in the operating room he was assigned to. This included the anesthesia equipment and the drugs that he would need to drop for each case.

Next, he would visit patients in the pre-op holding room and interview them about their medical history. Campagni referred to this step as giving patients an "abbreviated physical." Once this step was completed, he and his team would take the patients back for surgery.

Campagni's days would continue in that same routine for about four to five cases until the day ended between 3 and 5 p.m.

These days, when Campagni arrives at the hospital, he is required to have a mask on as he enters the building. The mask is fit-tested to each healthcare worker so that they are protected as much as possible. Luckily, for Campagni, his N-95 mask passed his fit-test, and he was not required to switch to a PAPR, a Powered Air Purifying Respirator, which Campagni described as a "tedious and bulky mask."

Campagni still preps his operating room the same way he normally does. However, the pre-op interviews with the patients look significantly different. The patients have masks on, and no family is allowed in the pre-op holding area.

Patients receive rapid and regular testing for the virus and Campagni and his staff receive those test results the day before, or the day of, the patient's surgery. "Even though all the patients are getting tested for COVID19, I assume everyone is positive, since there are false negatives, until proven otherwise," said Campagni. "As anesthesiologists, we are dealing with the airway, so we are at high-risk for exposure to COVID, especially from the air droplets."

In some cases, more safety precautions are taken in the operating room during patient intubation. "Sometimes, we'll have everyone in the operating room leave while we put the patients to sleep and get them intubated, since everyone is at higher risk with the air droplets during that process," said Campagni. "As soon as the patient's airway is secured, then everyone can come back into the room."

Campagni does not consider it scary or exhausting to go to work during these times. "The pandemic has definitely added another level of stress to my work, but I haven't really felt exhausted from it," said Campagni.

When asked if he has any doubts about his career choice and the effect of this pandemic on his occupation, Campagni said he has never regretted his career choice. “I speak for myself and my other anesthesia partners as we have adapted and take care of our patients the best way we know how,” said Campagni.

The biggest effect that the pandemic has had on Campagni’s work is the lower case volume he now receives and the stress of being exposed to patients who could potentially be positive.

On the other side of the country, north of San Diego, a Physicians Assistant in Internal Medicine, Halee Michel, 27, started her job right when the pandemic hit.

Michel has been in her occupation for a little less than a year and works at Zand Medical Partners, associated with St. Joseph’s Hospital.

Michel’s days in the field look rather similar to Campagni’s before and now during the pandemic.

Before the pandemic, Michel’s day would begin at 7 a.m. She would review the hospital floor census to see how many patients she had that day. She would then check patient labs and any new imaging that was done in her absence.

Once she was caught up on her patients’ statuses, she would make her rounds updating patients on their vitals and conditions and their potential for discharge. Michel would perform physical examinations and get overnight history from the patients, and would report her morning’s observations to her team.

At 10 a.m., Michel would go to “huddle,” a meeting with physicians, social workers, physical therapists, nutritionists, and other care team members. After that, she would go back to the office and read notes on the patients, including their assessments and plans. In the afternoon, she would have another round of hospital observations and another huddle, and would then go around with her team to each room and update patients and their families on each plan of action.

With the current pandemic conditions, Michel still arrives at the hospital around 7 a.m. But once she is done with her morning rounds at the hospital with the attending doctor, she goes to clinic where she spends the rest of her day providing tele-visits to patients. Michel says the pandemic has led to “less in-person patients and more telehealth visits.”

Luckily, for Michel, when in the hospital she only must wear a basic-grade mask since patients are only admitted once they receive a negative COVID test result.

The biggest change for Michel since the pandemic has been its effects on the job market. “I’m nervous about the uncertainty of the industry,” said Michel.

Michel is still trying to get a secure, long-term job, since she is right out of her Physician’s Assistant educational program and it has been hard for her to find a position. “Elective procedures aren’t happening, and patients don’t want to come in,” said Michel. This scenario is leading to a reduced need for certain physicians assistants since there are not as many patients to go around.

Like Campagni, Michel does not find it scary or exhausting to go to work during these times, either. “I consider it a part of my role and want to help people during the pandemic as much as possible,” said Michel.

When asked if she has any doubts about her career choice and the effect this pandemic has had on her occupation, Michel was quick to respond. “The pandemic has only confirmed that I chose the correct career for myself,” said Michel.