

# Impact

Newsletter

Summer 2020

**VGH+**  
**UBC** hospital  
foundation

## Heroes on the front lines

### Fighting COVID-19 at VGH

A man is sitting at home sipping on a hot cup of tea and reading news from his laptop when suddenly, like flipping a switch, he feels his throat contract. After a few more minutes he has difficulty breathing and starts to cough. The coughing doesn't stop. **In the next few hours he has fever spikes and can barely move. His chest slowly starts to feel heavier and heavier.**

The man's condition deteriorates rapidly and he is rushed to the ICU at VGH where he is quickly ushered into the quarantined COVID Unit. Here, patients are tended to by those on the front lines of this global pandemic — **our health care heroes.**

Dr. Donald Griesdale is an ICU physician at VGH, caring for the most vulnerable patients, fighting on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## The Doctor

"In the ICU, patients are primarily taken care of by a multidisciplinary team which consists of: nurses, respiratory therapists, physiotherapists, dieticians, pharmacists and occupational therapists, and I'm sure I'm forgetting someone," says Dr. Donald Griesdale, ICU physician at VGH. "And don't forget there are the huge number of support staff — cleaners, people to stock equipment, radiology technicians, biomedical engineering, facilities, maintenance and operations. Everyone is part of the care team."

Treating a COVID patient is all about the details for Dr. Griesdale – every staff interaction requires full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including a face shield, N95 mask, gown and gloves.

But the toughest part, according to Dr. Griesdale, is limiting a patient's interaction with their loved ones.

"Families aren't able to be in our critical care COVID Unit, which is really hard on both the patient and the family," explains Dr. Griesdale.

Seeing this unusual divide between patients and their loved ones truly highlights the importance of family engagement in a patient's care.

"We are using technology to help, like FaceTime, but I'm hoping we can continue to improve on getting families back as part of the care team," says Dr. Griesdale.

#### Fighting onward

At the end of the day, when his patients are set and cared for, Dr. Griesdale feels tired, but his motivation is unwavering. He's putting in extra hours to ensure those who need it are cared for. This is what he knows he needs to do in the midst of an unprecedented battle.

"This pandemic has taken its toll, but we're fighting through it together," says Dr. Griesdale.

#### The infection grows worse

The COVID-19 patient's condition continues to deteriorate. He is under round-the-clock, world-class care, yet the infection is still impacting his body.

But Dr. Griesdale's colleagues, Dr. Myp Sekhon and Cheryl Wellington, PhD, have an idea. They take a sample of the patient's blood and bring it to be analyzed at Dr. Wellington's donor-funded lab at UBC.

#### Their research could be the answer to saving this patient's life.

In the meantime, the patient remains in ICU under the expert hands of Dana Fedor, an ICU nurse working to help COVID infected patients at VGH.

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# Heroes on the front lines

## The Nurse

Dana Fedor is an ICU nurse at VGH. She has seen the worst of COVID-19, and fights to ensure those who are infected receive the care they need.

“Looking back on these past weeks, I can honestly say this has been one of my most difficult times in my 12 years working as a nurse,” says Dana Fedor, ICU nurse at VGH. “I have experienced every emotion humanly possible: fear, sadness, anger, pride, love. I have worked late and arrived home physically and mentally exhausted.”

But, despite it all, Dana can honestly say there is nowhere she would rather be than on the front lines against COVID-19, helping patients at their most vulnerable.

“Some of the sickest patients will be in the main COVID Unit receiving continuous renal repairment therapy,” says Dana. “This is dialysis that is ongoing. But the main concern is generally the lungs.”

### Using every tool at their disposal

Many patients are intubated and connected to a ventilator. Many go into renal failure, and if they have pre-existing

kidney problems those chances are increased.

There’s also a lot of equipment in a patient’s room: ventilator, dialysis machines as needed, a number of IV pumps. Nurses are getting creative in optimizing how often they need to enter a patient’s room by using extension tubing to keep IV pumps outside the room instead, saving time and precious PPE.

“One of our nurses researched using extension tubing to keep pumps outside the patient’s room to limit exposure,” says Dana. “A number of these sick patients are under a lot of infusions. So that’s a great idea to keep the IV pumps safely outside of the room.”

### Reaching a last resort

While the COVID-19 infected patient awaits the results of the testing being conducted at Dr. Wellington’s lab, he

faces the reality that the disease is continuing to damage his system.

His breathing has become increasingly laboured. He can barely pull in enough oxygen on his own. He needs breathing support – now.

The ICU nurses bring in the Respiratory Therapists – the experts who help treat every COVID-19 patient at VGH in respiratory distress.

The patient has read the news. He knows about the ventilators being used as a “last resort” to ensure breathing continues. After this, he doesn’t know if there are any other options.

He is intubated and given the oxygen his body needs to carry on this fight. What he doesn’t know yet is that his results have just been received from the lab. And this information will turn the tide.

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## Local research, global impact

Clinician-scientists at VGH are participating in a national trial utilizing plasma to better understand its potential as a therapy and treatment option for COVID-19 patients.

Researchers are collecting plasma from patients who have recovered from COVID-19 and developed an immune response, and then applying it to those currently infected. Early evidence indicates that this may be a promising treatment.

The trial aims to improve our understanding of this potential treatment’s power, which could help us treat and save patient lives.

Learn more about research currently underway at VGH: [vghfoundation.ca/covid-research](https://vghfoundation.ca/covid-research)



Dave Sahadeo is a Respiratory Therapist at VGH. His services are vital to COVID-19 infected patients dealing with respiratory distress.

## The Respiratory Therapist

“If you can’t breathe, you can’t do anything.”

Respiratory Therapist (RT) Dave Sahadeo has been working at VGH since 2017, helping patients who require respiratory aid to receive vital and life-saving care. But when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Metro Vancouver in March, it was unlike anything he had seen before.

“COVID-19 has significantly impacted my work and my life,” says Dave. “We have to wear full PPE for any COVID-positive or suspected patients. This makes it difficult to communicate between the patient and the staff as voices are muffled, and often the door is closed so you are either shouting through a glass door or trying to use a Walkie-Talkie.”

Then there’s the equipment. Any item that enters into a patient’s room that is not a hard wipeable surface or covered in plastic wrap gets disposed of because of the high risk of contamination.

This forces Dave and his fellow RT’s to be strategic about what they bring into a room to preserve supplies and reduce waste.

It’s a lot of work to care for a single patient, but this is why he chose his career – to literally help people keep breathing. Even at the cost of seeing his own family.

### Personal sacrifice, for us

“I told my family goodbye when our first COVID-19 case popped up,” says Dave. “I did this because they are particularly in a high-risk category for complications. I do remain dedicated to providing the best patient care that I can, but it takes a huge toll and sacrifice in my personal life to be there on the front lines for my patients.”

### World-class, coordinated care is saving lives

After just 24 hours, Dr. Sekhon and Dr. Wellington have analyzed markers in the patient’s blood and characterized his immune system. This information provided to his medical team – Dr. Don Griesdale, Dana Fedor and Dave Sahadeo – is vital, allowing them to provide personalized care.

Within a few hours of initial treatment, his system begins to rebound. After only a few days, he is officially released from the ICU. And just a few weeks later, he has fully recovered.

“Every patient we save from this pandemic is worth this herculean effort,” says Dr. Griesdale. “When we received our first COVID-infected patient, it was a fearful time. But every day at VGH we are learning more, and through research and expert care, we will find the answers to beat this disease.”

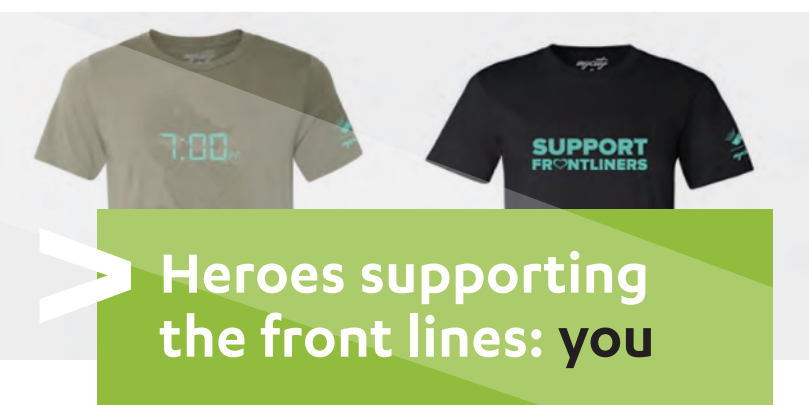


## Thank you for your support

As quickly as all our lives changed when COVID-19 arrived in BC, so did our community’s response.

Thank you to all those who have supported the Foundation’s COVID-19 fundraising efforts. Your gifts support our health care teams on the front lines to provide the best possible care, and ensure our researchers are able to continue to mobilize with others from around the world to treat and cure COVID-19.

To learn more please visit [vghfoundation.ca/covid-19-response](https://vghfoundation.ca/covid-19-response)



In the midst of a global pandemic, our philanthropic community has never shined brighter.

Weeks before restaurants and offices closed, individuals were already beginning to step forward to donate what they could to support the health care heroes you've just read about, and the research still being conducted that will change our future.

Businesses have stepped up to partner with us, providing what they can in order to do their part and help fight back against the threat of COVID-19.

And beyond funding, we are overjoyed with the gifts sent to our hospitals in support of those on the front lines: the PPE, essential groceries, the flowers and chocolates, meals and snacks, and the 7 o'clock cheer that our health care workers hear and feel every evening.

There have been incredible independent fundraisers from our partners in the community as well, including the Devin Townsend Quarantine Concert, DJ Neky's live set from their balcony, the Chinese Golf Clubs Association fundraiser and the VGH Youth Leadership Team's many activities.

You are the reason we do what we do, because we know you're out there and ready to support those who care for all of us.

This is the final edition of our *Impact* newsletter, but that does not mean we're done sharing stories.

We're going to be updating and expanding our content in a new magazine that will be delivered this fall, allowing us to deliver more comprehensively the beautiful stories you've come to expect from our grateful patients and the health care heroes who treat them.

BC's health care system is strong, and in no small part because of you. You have empowered us to continually transform health care and allow our heroes to do what they do best – save and improve lives.

Thank you to each and every one of you for your generous support.

Sincerely,

**Angela Chapman**  
President & CEO  
VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation



## Ways to give

Donors help deliver BC's best, most specialized care for adults, and there are many ways to give back. Consider partnering with us to organize a fundraiser or leave a gift in your will. Learn more at [vghfoundation.ca/ways-to-give](https://vghfoundation.ca/ways-to-give).

VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation partners with donors to drive innovation and sustainable health care at VGH, UBC Hospital, GF Strong Rehab Centre, Vancouver Coastal Health Research Institute and Vancouver Community Health Services.

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Please give: [vghfoundation.ca/donate](https://vghfoundation.ca/donate) | 604 875 4676 | 1 877 875 4676

**VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation** 190-855 West 12 Ave Vancouver, BC V5Z 1M9

Connect online: [vghfoundation.ca](https://vghfoundation.ca)



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