

FRONTLINE WORKERS FACE TRAUMATIC TIMES

Healthcare workers deal with one of the worst health crises in decades

FEATURE BY CAMERON BANDY
STAFF WRITER

Doctors and nurses, who’ve had to endure working in one of the most traumatic times fighting the worst health crisis in decades, must see horrific sights that have even made some nurses rethink continuing work in healthcare.

Frontline workers were among the hardest hit amid the brink of the first anniversary of COVID-19. Doctors and nurses, even before the pandemic, were understaffed, lacking necessary equipment, and working long hours. The coronavirus pandemic affected everyone, especially essential workers who were on the forefront of the virus.

The Coronavirus pandemic took the world by surprise with little time for preparation with the U.S. nearly hitting 30 million confirmed cases, according to the World Health Organization. It also hit the state of Arkansas hard with the state government enforcing mask mandates, businesses closings, and curfews. Arkansas has nearly 330 thousand cases and Craighead County with almost 15 thousand cases.

Hanna and Ronnie Koons, both respiratory therapists at St. Bernards, started as coworkers in 2007, started dating in 2011 and finally married in 2015.

Hanna, a Jonesboro native and mother of two, has a spirited personality who enjoys helping those in need which suits a therapist perfectly. However, the coronavirus pandemic turned everything around.

“It’s hard not seeing your family. People that did get the coronavirus, they were there without their family,” Hanna said.

The once ecstatic respiratory therapist that entered her workplace every day hoping to make a difference now seemed impossible. During the coronavirus outbreak, she worked 48 to 60 hours every week putting herself at risk of contracting the coronavirus.

Not only was the coronavirus hard on essential workers, but so were the many policy changes. It was now mandatory that all employees had to wear masks and other personal protective equipment that were always provided by the hospital. Also, the lack of hospital equipment made it harder for patients and nurses trying to help those in need. St. Bernards only had 22 intensive care unit beds available and all were being used until about two months ago. This week, only two are being used.

Although healthcare workers at the hospital were under tremendous stress, Hanna believes that the pandemic has helped her hospital grow as a team.

“I’ve become more involved in my job and learned a lot about respecting other people’s roles throughout the hospital. We’ve learned how to be a family and that we’re all needed,” Hanna said.

To alleviate her stressful work environment, Hanna enjoys walking, reading, and bowling a league with Ronnie on Thursday nights.

Ronnie, who has been a respiratory therapist at St. Bernards for 14 years, contracted the coronavirus and was sick for about three months. He is a COPD navigator at the hospital. Having the coronavirus himself helped him



PHOTO COURTESY OF HANNA KOONS

Respiratory therapists Ronnie and Hanna Koons started as coworkers in 2007, before they began dating in 2011 and married in

better understand how serious this virus was and how to further help his patients.

COPD navigators ensure patients receive not just appropriate care to treat their illness,

but make sure follow-up care is done. Essential workers, such as Hanna and Ronnie, helped cure many coronavirus cases -- but more should’ve been done.

Ronnie must make calls and go through numerous daily checks on his patients, which can be very stressful. He also manages readmission of those COPD patients.

“We should have shut down before the peak time of the virus, when no positive cases were active, but painting helps calm a tough workday,” Ronnie said.

Being a respiratory therapist himself, he knows how hard nurses like Hanna work to make sure patients are being treated with the best care possible.

Another nurse greatly affected by the pandemic was Allyson Stevens, who works at NEA Baptist Hospital and had graduated from A-State with a bachelor’s degree in nursing. Stevens has worked at NEA hospital nearly 2 years. This pandemic changed the normal roles of nurses with the change in policies at NEA hospital.

“The biggest change was the visitor policy. When cases rose quickly, the hospital no longer allowed visitors unless there were special circumstances. A lot of the emotional and physical support was transitioned on to us healthcare workers and we had to be the caregiver and also

the support system for patients,” Stevens said.

This pandemic changed Stevens’ perspective and made her realize that she is exactly where she needs to be. She mentioned not to take day-to-day things such as supplies, staff and family members for granted. Talking with close family and coworkers was the best way for Stevens to relieve stress during this time.

“Work became even more mentally and emotionally difficult than I ever thought it would be,” she said.

Stevens greatly thanks respiratory therapists like Ronnie and Hanna, because “they were the key factor of saving numerous lives.”

Respiratory therapists managed all patients on ventilators and provided breathing treatments to all patients regardless if they contracted the virus or not.

“Respiratory therapists need way more credit than they have been given during all of this. If it wasn’t for them, the death toll would more than likely be higher,” she said.

This pandemic changed the everyday work environment of the healthcare industry. During these anxious and stressful times, everyone should be thankful for essential workers as well as doing things to take your mind off anything life can throw at you.

ARKANSAS PASSES TWO ANTI-TRANSGENDER BILLS, HAS ANOTHER IN COMMITTEE

ALEX CLARK
LIFE EDITOR

Gov. Asa Hutchinson vetoed the SAFE Act Monday, but the Arkansas House and Senate both voted to override his veto.

The Save Adolescents from Experimentation (SAFE) Act, proposed by Arkansas Rep. Robin Lundstrum, bans gender transition procedures for trans people who are under the age of 18. This means denying access to things such as puberty blockers and hormone replacement therapy.

Hutchinson vetoed the bill Monday and said, “This is a government overreach. You are starting to let lawmakers interfere with healthcare and set a standard for legislation overriding healthcare. The state should not presume to jump into every ethical health decision.”

Hutchinson felt the bill was overbroad, did not grandfather

in those already undergoing gender-affirming treatment and sent a message about Arkansas he did not want to send.

Despite this, the House and Senate still voted to override the veto, making Arkansas the first state to ban gender affirming care for transgender youth.

Family Council President Jerry Cox said, “This is really good news. Gender-reassignment surgeries can leave children sterilized and scarred for life. Medical researchers do not know the long term effects these procedures and therapies can have on kids. That is why many people equate them with experimenting on children. This good legislation will protect Arkansas’ children from sex-reassignment procedures.”

While Hutchinson vetoed the SAFE Act, he did sign the Fairness in Women’s Sports Act, a bill sponsored by Sen.

Missy Irvin banning transgender women from participating in women’s sports. Hutchinson became the second governor to sign a bill of this nature.

In response to Hutchinson signing this bill, Human Rights Campaign President Alphonso David said, “Transgender kids are kids who just want to play, and they deserve that chance. The fact that neither Governor Hutchinson nor the legislators who voted to pass this bill have named a single example of what they are legislating against underscores that this is simply a politically motivated bill for the sake of discrimination itself.”

Another bill is currently in committee, HB1749, which would require Arkansas public school employees to refer to students using only the name and sex listed on a student’s birth certificate. This bill is sponsored by Rep. Mary Bentley.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HANNA KOONS

This photo shows Hanna Koons dressed in Personal Protective Equipment at work at St. Bernard’s Medical Center during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interested in reporting? Join us every Monday at 5 p.m. in room 224 in the Communications Building.

Upcoming activities to get you out of your room this spring

EMMA ALLEN

STAFF WRITER

The weather is getting warmer which means more activities are going to be taking place. There will be many indoor and outdoor activities taking place around campus and in Jonesboro.

The Horticulture Spring Plant Sale will be April 9, from noon to 2 p.m. This event is hosted by the College of Agriculture and will take place in the Agriculture Building Greenhouses. It will be open to the public. There will be a wide variety of plants to purchase at the event.

If you want to see an Arkansas State University Department of Theatre performance, they will be doing so April 16-18 with three days of Pay-Per-View. They will be performing “Everybody” by Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins online. The event is open to the public.

The theatre department will also be putting on “Revue: A Musical Retrospective” directed by Brianna Lucas Larson with music direction by Jason Eschhofen. This performance will take place at the Fowler Center South Entrance April 23 and 24 at 7:30 p.m. and April 25 at 2 p.m. This is a journey through musical theatre from 1900-2000. This event is a live, outdoor event and will be socially distanced. The event is open to the public.

Arkansas State University is hosting a Tie Dye Day event April 20 from 3-6 p.m. This event will be on the Reng Student Union Lawn. University Housing will provide custom A-State tank tops and snow cones.

On April 24, the National Student Speech Language

Hearing Association will be hosting a 5K for the Dr. Neely Scholarship. The event will take place from 8-10 a.m. at the A-State Pavilion. It will cost \$30 to register for the event, and

you will receive a T-shirt. Children 10 and under may register for \$20 and get a T-shirt.

Craighead County Master Gardener Plant Sale will take place on April 24, from 8 a.m.

to 2 p.m. at the Farmers Market Building. The plants that are being sold have been donated by the Craighead County Master gardeners, who are trained volunteers who fund scholar-

ships for A-State horticulture students.

So many great activities have been planned for A-State and Jonesboro. Enjoy the sunshine and campus and have fun.



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

“Everybody” is a modern riff on the 15th-century morality play “Everyman.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

“Revue: A Musical Retrospective” follows musical theatre from 1900-2000.

THIS WEEK'S POP PICK



POSTER COURTESY OF IMDB

“Godzilla Vs. Kong” (dir. Adam Wingard)

“Godzilla Vs. Kong” (dir. Adam Wingard) had the highest-grossing opening weekend for any movie in North America during the COVID-19 pandemic. The movie made \$32.2 million during its opening weekend, having premiered in theaters March 31.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FACEBOOK

The National Student Speech Language Hearing Association will be hosting a 5K for the Dr. Neely Scholarship.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FACEBOOK

The Craighead County Master Gardeners' Plant Sale will be held at the ASU Farmers' Market.

HOROSCOPES

ALEX CLARK
MYSTIC CORRESPONDENT

ARIES (March 22 - April 19) It is time to let go of something that is not serving you anymore. Not everything lasts forever.	TAURUS (April 20 - May 20) You are approaching some type of breakthrough. Be open to the things that are coming.	GEMINI (May 21 - June 20) Now is a good time to gather with the people you love. Share positive feelings and create with them.	CANCER (June 21 - July 22) You need to make decisions without letting outside forces sway you. The decisions you make now will have long-term effects.
LEO (July 23 - Aug. 22) Remember that the grass is not always greener on the other side. Discontentment does not always mean you need to make a drastic change.	VIRGO (Aug. 23 - Sept. 22) Allowing your fear and self-doubt to hold you back will cause you to lose opportunities. Learn from your past mistakes.	LIBRA (Sept. 23 - Oct. 22) Decide what you want and go for it. Now is the best time to lay a solid foundation.	SCORPIO (Oct. 23 - Nov. 21) You need to find more confidence in yourself. Focus on people and situations that make you feel good.
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 - Dec. 21) Have your past actions contributed to your present circumstances? Think about how you've affected your current position.	CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 - Jan. 19) You are finally moving on from something that has been bothering you. Leave it in the past for good.	AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 - Feb. 18) You need to stay one step ahead of the game. Not everything is what it seems to be.	PISCES (Feb. 19 - March 21) Stop suppressing your soft side. Stop putting the needs of others before your own.