

# Redeployment from the Frontline: One Sleep Technologist's Experience During COVID-19

By Kate Jacobson

Sleep technologists from across the world have been redeployed in the face of COVID-19. They've been called on to help COVID-19 patients, to test those coming in and out of the hospital and to help disperse personal protective equipment (PPE) to other departments. For Eduardo Hernandez, BSRC, RPSGT, CCSH who works at Nemours Children's Hospital in Orlando, the experience really opened his eyes to how valuable sleep technologists are during a crisis such as this.

"We're malleable," he said. "There's so many different hats a sleep technologist wears, and that's why we've stepped up during this pandemic."

Hernandez said his hospital started making changes in mid-March like many other health care institutions. His sleep lab started cancelling appointments two weeks out, and he and his coworkers were quickly put to use in other areas of the hospital. Those that were dual credentialed in respiratory therapy were all redeployed in the region to respond to COVID-19 patients, while others were given jobs around the hospital.

Hernandez said most of his coworkers were tasked with monitoring people for symptoms as they entered the hospital, while others were asked to help with PPE. Called the Mask Exchange Transfer and Training program, technologists and others from different hospital concentrations were asked to keep track of how many N-95 masks were available in the hospital and instruct on appropriate fitting.

Others started preparing the hospital for potential overflow of patients from other area hospitals.

"The first thing—it was shock, for better or for worse," said Hernandez. "We were getting to meet everyone in the hospital and they were getting to meet us. We were screening employees at all entry and exit points of the hospital and we got to see people we would've never seen. It felt like a sense of identity, though—we're all in this together."

While COVID-19 numbers in Orlando didn't reach critical levels—the Florida Department of Health reports a total of 1,831 cases in Orange County as of the end of May—Hernandez said everyone wanted to do their part to ensure the hospital was ready. It was that sense of camaraderie that made working through an unprecedented crisis a little bit easier.

"Taking a step back and looking through our response, I really appreciate we had this sense of community working through this," he said. "No job is too small here. I'd like to think that since everyone is doing their part, everyone keeps in the back of their minds that even though some of the work isn't in our scope of practice, we're doing what we need to have done. We have all these things in place to isolate potentially infected patients. We've done a phenomenal job."

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He said moving forward, he thinks this will change the hospital in a larger way. Some processes introduced during the pandemic will probably stay—especially procedures looking at what PPE is in stock and how it's being distributed. He said he also thinks it will be an important moment for reinforcing clean, sterilized work environments.

Mostly, though, it's given Hernandez a greater appreciation for all his colleagues—in and out of the sleep lab. Once things return to the new normal, he said he hopes those connections continue.

"The silver lining of this is we get to leave our four walls of the sleep lab," he said. "We can all lend a hand." 🌙



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