



Member Profile: Jade Shultis, respiratory therapist

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Jade Shultis didn't have to work too hard to find her career path.

As a kid, she was fascinated by medical dramas on TV.

"My parents thought I was a bit crazy - an 11-year-old watching *Trauma: Life in the E.R.*," she says with a laugh. By the time she graduated from high school, Shultis knew not only that she wanted to work in health care, but that she wanted to become a respiratory therapist.

"It's not a nurse, not a doctor, and it's something unusual that almost no one had heard of. I thought it was pretty cool," she says.

Shultis went straight from grade 12 to a demanding three-year diploma program at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, and after that started as a casual at Victoria's Royal Jubilee Hospital.

Four years later, Shultis holds a full-time permanent position, and finds her work more fulfilling than any TV show.

The fact that almost no one has heard of RTs provides motivation for Shultis, who loves advocating for her professional almost as much as she does practising it. Back when she was a student, she made a video called "Ventil*or Boi" about a day in the life of an RT. It takes a high-energy rock-n-roll approach (complete with a pink inflatable electric guitar) to its subject matter, and won first place in a Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists' competition, garnering her a trip to the CSRT conference in Ottawa. (Watch it on HSA's Facebook

page or at on [YouTube](#))

Shultis has been an HSA steward since March and also is an HSA rep on her facility's Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee. She started out feeling skeptical, but getting involved has opened her eyes.

"Actually, I was not a big fan of HSA because I was not aware of what they were doing for us. I thought we didn't have a voice, because we are shift workers, who only make up 4 per cent of the union. But I figured I couldn't sit back and complain unless I was willing to do something. Now I have so much more appreciation for what HSA does for us.

"For instance, a few years ago, we wanted better shift differentials," she explains. These are the premiums paid for night and weekend shifts. "Studies have shown that working night shift takes 10 years off your life. So we should get compensated. But the HSA differential is only \$1.75 per shift, while nurses get \$3.00. We are working elbow to elbow on the same shift but they get almost twice as much for it."

"HSA fought for better shift differentials continuously, and this year we finally succeeded. As of January 2014 they are doubling, which puts us on a par with nurses," says Shultis.

Shultis currently wants to shine a light on her profession to help address recruitment issues at Vancouver Island hospitals, which struggle with a chronic shortage of RTs.

"Not only are we up against Alberta's better wages, but also the Lower Mainland offers full-time jobs with full benefits right away. We can't provide that, but we have a ton of casual work and aren't able to attract new grads to the Island."

As a result, RTs on the island face the pressure of picking up extra shifts to fill the gaps in the schedule, putting huge pressure on existing RTs. Shultis cites a recent case in Nanaimo where an RT ended up working 36 hours straight.

"I don't yet know how but I'd like to address this," says Shultis. She can vouch that Vancouver Island is a great place to live and work. "Who doesn't love the Island? The pace is a bit slower here, and it's so beautiful."

Shultis' enthusiasm for her work took her to another Island, Haiti, last year, to volunteer with Project Medishare. She spent a week in Port Au Prince working side by side with Haitian health care staff. She and her colleagues provided training in ventilator use and CPR, which led to one of her most treasured memories of the trip: "With the help of an interpreter we were teaching a group of Haitian nurses. As you may know, CPR is done at a rate of approximately 100 beats per minutes, and often to assist in keeping pace we think of the song "Staying Alive" and compress the chest to the beat of that song. I and the other trainer happened to have this song on our phones so we played it to the nurses. They started singing and dancing around. Everyone was laughing, and learning CPR at the same time."

Sounds more like "Glee" than "Trauma: Life in the E.R." Clearly, Shultis has gone beyond the world of television medical shows, taking RT out into real life as a practitioner and advocate, here in BC and around the world.

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