

BULLETIN

Ingrid Hakanson, respiratory therapist

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When Vancouver General Hospital Respiratory Therapist Ingrid Hakanson heard that a film crew would be coming into her workplace to make a documentary about the emergency ward, she had no idea she'd end up as a 'star' in a high-quality TV show that put health science professionals like herself at centre stage.

"I assumed the doctors and nurses would get all the attention, just like in typical TV medical dramas," says Hakanson. She and her colleagues had no idea that respiratory therapists, represented by Hakanson, would play a major role in the first episode until they attended a special preview screening.

"I don't think anyone expected that. We were in shock! What great promotion for our profession. Anyone who's been, or had a family member who's been, gravely ill knows something about what we do, but nonetheless we are a young and growing specialization still gaining our voice. We've been around for 50 years in North America, and still have no presence at all in many countries."

The Knowledge Network series, entitled *Emergency Room: Life and Death at VGH*, featured Hakanson in two of its six episodes. Others focused on social workers, the unit coordinator, paramedics, and doctors and nurses. Hakanson says the filming process, surprisingly, didn't slow down the high-pressured VGH emergency ward.

"The crew were excellent at staying out of our way when things were crazy. They'd wait till we stopped moving

then approach to ask if we could clarify in layman's terms what they'd just witnessed, so that people watching could understand," says Hakanson. They also brought Hakanson to the studio for a personal interview which was woven into the footage.

The final product, says Hakanson, provides an honest look at what really happens in a busy urban emergency ward, and how the different staff play their roles. "Everyone involved felt valued. The film crew did a great job!"

In her job as a respiratory therapist, Hakanson cycles between 10 different areas of the hospital, usually staying in each area for approximately eight shifts. As well as the ER, this includes cardiac surgery, neurosurgery, trauma, wards, the spinal unit, critical care outreach, and patient transports. Hakanson loves all aspects of her job but says the ER is her favourite place to work.

"I like the unpredictability of emergency. There's an adrenaline rush, and lots of running around. We do a lot of problem solving on the fly, and we get to be active participants in diagnosis."

The diversity offered by her profession was one of the main reasons Hakanson chose this career. "The scope of practice for an RT is so enormous. Every day is different. You interact with all kinds of people," she says.

Hakanson started out with a BSc from UBC. She worked as a lab technologist at the BC Cancer Agency, but found that spending her time staring into a microscope was not fulfilling her needs for action and interaction. When a house guest who worked as a RT explained to her what he did, Hakanson was immediately interested. She soon enrolled in Thompson Rivers University, graduated with a diploma in 2007, and has been working at VGH since then.

"It's a great place to work. We have a really strong team dynamic here," Hakanson says. She's pleased that the Knowledge Network documentary gave her a key role in showing the public what that team looks like in action, and doesn't seem phased at all by her alternate career as a TV celebrity.

"I went to a respiratory therapy conference soon after it aired [in early 2014] and I felt like a bit of a star! It was kind of fun," she says.

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