

Transcript

Hospital Interviews: TAJ – Consultant Anaesthetist

Taj Fragene, Consultant Anaesthetist:

My name is Taj Fragene, I'm a consultant anaesthetist. So my role pre-COVID was to provide safe anaesthesia for people having operations. During the coronavirus surge we got co-opted to work in intensive care. So we were being pulled in a dozen different directions, all over the same time period and there's only so many of us. We'd be asked to look after part of the intensive care unit, to look after those patients on there. Then we'd also be asked to form an intubation team, so when there was a sick person anywhere in the hospital we would transfer them to intensive care. Quite frankly, it was horrible, is the truth. If I could sum up the coronavirus surge in one word, I think it would be tears. I saw so many people just in tears, my colleagues, my friends, obviously patients and patients' relatives and it was really tough. I heard a lot of people's last words over that period of time and that's something that will stay with me for a long time I think. As people unfortunately started dying, what's clear as day is that there is a higher risk of people who are non-white, so that does play on my mind because let's face it, I am a black, slightly overweight male in my forties, you know, so I'm not low, low risk at the moment so I do feel anxious about that. And not only about risk to myself, but also about taking coronavirus home on my skin or my clothes to my family at home as well. It's balancing your personal risk against the people who are gasping for air coming through our doors. One of the things I, coming out of it, I felt very proud of was that we stepped towards and didn't step away. And actually, if we do step away on a second surge then I think long term that will be harder for me to deal with. I have reflected on it and I've thought about it on something that affects the whole society and COVID is affecting our whole society. I think it has really shown in the starkest term how unequal our society is. The difference in outcomes based on ethnicity, it's there, it's a real thing. When you come to talk about race or racial disparity that it's easier and more comfortable for people to ignore, pretend it's not an issue and you know, for the vast majority people it's not an issue, but for some of us this is our life, it touches everything that we do. I think a lot of it comes down to how much power you perceive you have. As a doctor I have a reasonable amount of power influence and say so, but you know, not everybody is or can be in that position. It always seems to be the minority person that should be expected to know or articulate it and actually, racism it's an issue of our structures and society and for white people as well. So actually, it would be nice if the majority white people have those discussions too.