



Yellowjacket Heroes – Sharon Ajarapu – class of 2006

Dialysis is a life-saving treatment for those with kidney disease. 2006 CHS graduate, Sharon Ajarapu, is a registered nurse who has been working with dialysis patients for over five years. When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Kansas City, Sharon recognized that she would likely treat COVID patients on a regular basis. Dialysis is an essential treatment and cannot be deferred until after the pandemic.

Sharon's career in nursing started close to home – her mother was a nurse and helped nurture a love of serving and caring heart for patients in Sharon from an early age. Sharon started her nursing career in long term care while also working occasionally as a substitute school nurse substitute in the Center School District (where she also lives and sends her children to school). She really enjoyed the ability to develop a relationship with students. Her best friend suggested that Sharon would enjoy being a dialysis nurse for the same reason. Dialysis patients typically receive treatment 3 days per week and their sessions last from 3-5 hours each. They are grouped in a horseshoe shaped configuration of charis with lots of time to build relationships. Sharon says it's like having a large group of grandparents, sharing stories of life and family during their treatments. Much of the Sharon's work is helping to make a difficult and tedious process as positive as possible for her patients.

When COVID-19 became a reality in Kansas City, the staff at Sharon's facility met to review their plans. From the beginning, it was clear that discontinuing treatment services was not an option for their patients. The staff would need to continue to serve, even if patients tested positive for COVID-19. They reviewed protocols, developed testing plans, created ways to isolate patients who tested positive, and did everything possible to protect the health of both patients and staff. Even with the precautions, it was frightening for all the staff to think that they would be exposed to the virus and would be at risk for spreading it to their own families. Sharon's clinic has had at least one patient who contracted the virus and passed away. The nature of kidney disease is that it leaves patients highly vulnerable to infections, so the presence of the coronavirus makes them even more aware than normal of the importance of hygiene and infection control.

Thanks to Sharon Ajarapu and all our Yellowjacket Heroes for their service and caring for our communities.