



4:19 PM

High level of care in the ICU

To work in the ICU, you need a 'strong soul'

There's no such thing as a boring day in the adult critical care unit — the ICU — at Tacoma General, according to Matt Dustin, RN.

“There's not a day that's not busy,” he says. “It can be chaotic.”

It's 3pm and today he's dedicated his time to taking care of one patient who needs extra time and attention. The high level of care in the ICU is what drew Dustin, 43, to become a nurse in his late thirties.

Dustin's background as a military police officer and construction worker give him a unique perspective — he says most nurses start young and many move on to administration or other work by the time they're his age.

“Boy, I could do this for a while,” he says. “This is interesting stuff. You have to be energetic; you have to have a strong soul.”

Common cases in the ICU include patients suffering from chronic pulmonary problems such as emphysema, asthma and lung disease. The ICU also sees a lot of patients suffering from sepsis, which is a life-threatening reaction to an infection that can cause tissue damage, organ failure and death.

“It's not easy,” Dustin says. “It's a busy job. Sometimes we're not able to physically give everything we can. We have to spend more time with the sickest patients. We do care.”

Dustin got in the door at Tacoma General by working as a housekeeper while he was in nursing school at Tacoma Community College. He still takes special care to avoid leaving messes behind for the housekeeping staff he was once a part of.

“I know what it's like to be on that side of things,” he says.

Though being an ICU nurse is a high-stress job, Dustin quickly lists off the perks: the pay, the great doctors and coworkers, his unit's dynamic — and making a difference in people's lives.

“I wouldn't trade it in,” he says.

“There's not a day that's not busy.”
