

## A new purpose

### Lebanon man survives deadly condition and is doing his part to help educate others

By Emily LaForme

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Darrell Raikes' life was completely changed forever on May 26, 2015.



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Darrell Raikes proudly shows off his awards as international ICU hero of the year, with his service dog, Harvey. Raikes was diagnosed with sepsis and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) on May 26, 2015. Since then, he's been devoting his time to giving back and speaking about long-term illness and disease.

After a routine knee replacement surgery, he developed sepsis and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). But, he says it's through that diagnosis that he found his true life's purpose.

Sepsis is a serious condition resulting from the presence of harmful microorganisms in the blood or other tissues and the body's response to their presence, which can potentially lead to malfunction of various organs, shock, and even death.

"Fifty percent of the people that have sepsis die, and 50 percent of the people that have ARDS die, so I should be 100 percent dead," said Raikes. "It's forever changed my life. Not only was it a roller coaster ride in the hospital, but after, as well. You have good days and bad days. It's completely changed my life."

Raikes, 56, suffers from post-traumatic stress from both his diagnosis and stay in the ICU, where he was in a medically induced coma for four weeks and experienced delirium. He also deals with anxiety and depression. He has since learned to adjust his way of living, and he also has a service dog, Harvey, who assists him. Despite all of this, Raikes is determined to give back. He now lives by three words: patience, determination and purpose, and has been speaking about sepsis for more than a year. He also began volunteering in the ICU and ER.

"When I was sitting in my critical care doctor's office, I was going back and forth about whether or not I could return to work," said Raikes. "I have a lot of determination in me. I was determined to go back to work, but after nine months I realized I couldn't do it. So, my critical care doctor told me I needed to be on disability."

But, Raikes' doctor, Dr. Ashley Montgomery, asked him if he would like to start volunteering every week in the Emergency Room, talking with patients and families during their own emergencies. After a few months, Raikes transferred to the ICU, where he continues to visit and work weekly.

"I mentor and give encouragement to patients and families," said Raikes. "I tell them what lies ahead and what they can expect long-term, especially the effects that come with it. PTSD, Post-ICU syndrome, Post-Sepsis Syndrome, depression, anxiety, cognitive issues and so on."

Raikes also goes to a monthly meeting at the University of Kentucky Hospital, where he sits on a panel that discusses how to continually make the hospital better.

"Things will be different in your life forever, so you need a new purpose," said Raikes. "This is my purpose in life. I was an engineer before. I travelled the world. But, that wasn't even a purpose. That was a job. My purpose now is volunteering and giving back to those who are critically ill."

Raikes was named this year's international ICU Hero of the Year. His wife, Sarah, and his critical care doctor, along with four nurses, flew to San Diego in February to receive the award. He said it's motivated him to continue raising awareness for sepsis and other life-threatening diseases. He is currently working on promoting legislation in Kentucky, which would help increase critical response time on diagnosing sepsis in patients at the hospital. It could potentially save lives, Raikes said.

"My goal for this year is to have a bill proposed in Kentucky," said Raikes. "I can't make it pass, but I can help promote it and propose it. I'm working with Senator Jimmy Higdon on it. If passed, Kentucky would join three other states (New York, New Jersey and Illinois), which would have hospitals look for signs of sepsis when a patient arrives at the hospital immediately."

Vanderbilt University asked Raikes to go to Boston to speak on delirium in June. Raikes will also be going to New York City next year as he is nominated for Sepsis Hero of the Year.

"I know when I die, I will be remembered for my new purpose," he said. "If I die tomorrow, I would be good with that because there will be a red and black ribbon beside me, the sepsis awareness ribbon. I feel like I've done good for a lot of people. I mentor people all over the world about what living with sepsis is like. I don't know why more hospitals and people don't talk about sepsis, but my goal is to spread that awareness so everyone knows about it."