

Helping to End the Fear

CHHS volunteers at vaccination sites

Friday, February 26, 2021

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KATHLEEN HIGGS, CLINICAL ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF NURSING, (BLUE COAT, NEXT TO TABLE) AND CHHS STUDENTS AT THE ROCHESTER HOUSING AUTHORITY WHERE THEY ADMINISTERED COVID-19 VACCINES.

Early in December, when the state of New Hampshire was expecting its first shipments of COVID-19 vaccines, officials sought help with distribution. Volunteers who would assist with all aspects of the massive undertaking, from administering injections to overseeing transportation and security issues. Angela Braswell of the [College of Health and Human Services](#) was quick to step up.

“Because I am a registered nurse, I am on the state approved list of vaccinators, so I am able to function in that role. However, if needed, I can and am willing to provide nonclinical support as well,” says Braswell, a clinical assistant professor of nursing. “Honestly, I think we were all hoping for an earlier rollout, but my first volunteer opportunity didn’t come up until late January.”

“Our students have gained an understanding of community health as well as contributed to being a solution to COVID.”

And since then, opportunities have been hard to come by. “Believe it or not, when the sign-ups come through via email looking for volunteers, they fill up within minutes,” she says.

To date, 15 percent of New Hampshire residents have received the first vaccine while 7 percent have had both shots. Some of those injections were administered by CHHS students after Kathleen Higgs, clinical assistant professor of nursing, connected with area health networks about utilizing students at their clinics. The nursing students have helped with everything from prescreening to drawing up doses of vaccines, giving the injections, completing vaccination cards and observing recipients for adverse reactions after getting their shots.

“Our students have gained an understanding of community health as well as contributed to being a solution to COVID,” Higgs says. “They have learned about caring for patients in a community setting versus the hospital setting that they generally would see in their nursing curriculum.”

Higgs has also been a volunteer and has witnessed the gratitude of those who have been able to receive the vaccine.

“The recipients have been extremely grateful and very excited to be getting vaccinated. There have been people nearly in tears because they are so thankful,” she says. “It feels like we are making a difference and helping to put an end to the fears and restrictions everyone has lived with for the last year.”

Braswell agrees. “In my limited experience, I have to say that people have been incredibly positive about, and grateful for, the opportunity to be vaccinated.”

Wendy Presley is in the [psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner certification program](#) at UNH. She has been able to volunteer twice, once at Community Partners in Dover and again at the C and J bus terminal in Dover, one of the state’s 13 larger vaccine sites. At both locations Presley gave injections.

“All of the recipients that I have encountered are very appreciative and patient,” Presley says. “The fixed sites are run by the National Guard and are well oiled machines. Very efficient. Nice group to work with, so courteous with the volunteers and the recipients.”

Presley works at Frisbie Memorial Hospital in Rochester. She was part of the team that vaccinated the staff there.

“It has been a great joy to be part of the vaccination effort. At a time when we feel so helpless, it feels empowering. I have spoken to other volunteers and they feel the same way. Volunteering is a form of therapy during these troubled times,” Presley says.

Dakota Bertholet '23 worked alongside Higgs at the Rochester Housing Authority, administering vaccines at the drive-through clinic. She called it an amazing experience.

“Through this clinic I was able to meet many members of the community, all who were excited to be receiving this vaccine since they were in a high risk population,” Bertholet says. “As a nursing student, I was thrilled to be partaking in community health firsthand during such a historic time. With such a dark period that we all have been through, being able to be a small part of the solution is something I will never forget.”

- WRITTEN BY:

[Jody Record '95](#) | Communications and Public Affairs | jody.record@unh.edu

COLLEGE OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES



University of New Hampshire

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