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ENACONNECTION

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Vaccine Volunteerism

Emergency Nurses Help Administer COVID-19 Shots to Public

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ENA Quality and Safety Director Catherine Olson (above) volunteers at her county's vaccine clinic in Colorado



ENA President Ron Kraus assists at a large clinic organized by Indiana University Health

Emergency nurses are accustomed to seeing people on their worst day. But nurses volunteering at COVID-19 vaccination clinics across the country are experiencing a completely different atmosphere: one of hope and relief, of happy tears and laughs, and of gratitude.

"It has ranged from excitement to tears, and those tears could be either from anxiety or pure joy," said ENA Quality and Safety Director Catherine Olson, MSN, RN, who lives in Castle Rock, Colorado.

When vaccine availability was on the horizon in November, Olson emailed the Tri-County Health

online CDC training. She now volunteers four hours a week at the county's vaccine clinic. When weekend clinics launched in April, she signed up for some eight-hour weekend shifts.

Initially, Olson would meet patients one-on-one in a private exam room, where she would verify health information, give the shot and provide education about the vaccine. But, as the weeks progressed, the process became more streamlined and efficient. Now, Olson only gives the vaccine after other nurses provide screening and education.

"Every time I go in, every week there are changes because this is an evolving, dynamic situation," she said. "This is a huge undertaking logistically."

ENA President Ron Kraus, MSN, RN, EMT, CEN, TCRN, ACNS-BC, volunteered to vaccinate at a large clinic set up by his employer, Indiana University Health. For him, it was rewarding to increase the number of vaccinated people in the country. He reflected on the long road emergency nurses have traveled since the early days of the U.S. outbreak in February 2020.



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"(I tell the students) we are a professional organization, that we welcome students and we want to mentor them. And then I talk to them about our ENA state council and how they can get involved as a student."

— Ginny Orcutt, MSN, RN, CEN



Arizona ENA State Council members Rita Anderson (left) and Roger Dupont help to administer shots to patients at a site near Sun City, Arizona

"Seeing the fear and anguish in nurses' eyes last March compared to now after they've had their vaccine and they don't feel as scared — there's just a sense of ease in their mind to come to work," Kraus said. "It's almost a calling [to vaccinate] so everybody else can get that ease."

Retired emergency nurse Roger Dupont, RN, CEN, has been volunteering since December at vaccine clinics near his home in Sun City, Arizona. Although his knees and hips keep telling him to take a break from the long, standing-only shifts, he can't seem to stop.

"Somebody told me once that when you retire, you no longer have a paycheck; now you have to find a purpose," Dupont said. "So, this is part of my journey."

Nearly every day, Dupont logs on to local websites that announce volunteer openings. He typically signs up for one to two shifts a week. He has volunteered at a wide range of sites — a drive-up clinic on a hospital campus, pop-up sites, walk-up sites at an urban park and a

"What was interesting was they were all the same, but they were all different," he said about the sites. "There are plenty of opportunities to volunteer, and I'm so impressed with the number and the scope and the experience of some of the people I've worked with," he said.

Volunteers included many retired nurses and physicians in all fields, he explained.

When Dupont was assigned to observe vaccinated patients, he did more than monitor for side effects. Drawing on his emergency nursing experience, he struck up conversations with people, while also asking if they had any questions or concerns about the vaccine or their overall health.

He and other emergency nurses are educating more than just the patients.

At several clinics in Arizona, student nurses lent a hand as part of their first clinical rotations.

"Here in Arizona, as across the nation, students have not been getting a lot of hands-on clinical time, so for many of these students, this was their first time touching a patient," said Ginny Orcutt, MSN, RN, CEN, a staff nurse with Abrazo Health in Arizona.

Orcutt often worked in the observation unit, allowing the student nurses to gain experience by giving vaccines. Students taking their turn in the observation unit sometimes wished they were administering shots instead. That's when Orcutt would point out that the waiting patients provided a prime opportunity for the students to learn the "therapeutic art of conversation." She would model how to reassure and educate patients.

Orcutt, an Arizona ENA State Council past president and current chairperson for the state's membership and media relations committees, would often introduce herself to the students at lunchtime and hand out her ENA business cards.

"I introduce the fact that we are a professional organization, that we welcome students and we want to mentor them," Orcutt said. "And then I talk to them about our ENA state council and how they can get involved as a student."

Orcutt, who is semi-retired, was paid by Abrazo to give COVID-19 vaccines from Dec. 26 through March. She worked twice a week at a large drive-through clinic with eight car lanes. After that site closed, she began volunteering at clinics in April.

o'clock in the morning if someone's willing to get a shot then."