CSM Donates College’s Medical Supplies and Equipment; Nursing Students Volunteer for the Front Lines of Pandemic Response

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CSM staff and faculty pack up the college’s PPE and medical supplies to donate to local health care providers caring for patients in the nation’s battle against the coronavirus pandemic.

La Plata, MD - When the national call to action sounded for public donations of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in mid-March, College of Southern Maryland (CSM) Health Sciences Division Chair Dr. Laura Polk rallied her CSM colleagues – and got to work. She immediately organized staff and faculty to gather the college’s PPE and medical supplies for local health care providers who were preparing for the surge of COVID-19 patients in the nation’s battle against the coronavirus pandemic.

Among the items the CSM colleagues packed up to donate to Calvert Health, Charles Regional Medical Center, MedStar St. Mary’s and Southern Maryland hospitals were more than 22,000 pairs of non-sterile gloves; 2,500 pairs of sterile gloves; 1,000 face masks; 1,400 isolation gowns and gallons of antibacterial soap, hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes. Polk was also able to donate two ventilators to the Maryland Department of Health for state-wide allocation. CSM’s donations to the state’s pandemic response equaled more than $30,000 in equipment and supplies. The college has also made its campuses available for storage space or emergency staging to the tri-county emergency management teams and experts.

But Polk didn’t stop there.

Along with joining the CSM faculty’s tireless efforts to bring CSM to a virtual learning environment, she collaborated with the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS) and helped develop a process that identified three levels of care that CSM nursing students – and college nursing students from around the state – could register for in order to assist in the COVID-19 response. The ‘Nursing Clinical Extern Portal’ has now been in place for several weeks and it complements the volunteers who are staffing the Maryland Medical Reserve Corps.

“There are at least 260 nursing students in our programs, more than 60 students signed up as Clinical Externs to help with acute care staffing across the state. That equates to more than 20 percent of our nursing students who are volunteering to go the front lines in any way they can – all the while keeping up with their course work.”

CSM President Dr. Maureen Murphy shared that she isn’t surprised by the faculty, staff and students’ efforts.

“I think it is extraordinary the way that everyone is ‘leaning in’ to answer the call to help with things we never thought we’d have to deal with,” Murphy said. “But that is exactly what the CSM family does day-in, and day-out.”

“To me, it’s all about fulfilling our mission,” Polk said. “We are here to help our learners be the best they can be and we’re here to build collaborative community partnerships. These are the very days when we absolutely need to be giving back to, and assisting, our community partners in every way that we can.”

Students on the Front Lines

Shannon Windsor, 26, of Dentville, is a fourth-semester nursing student and one of the CSM students ‘leaning in.’ Three weeks away from graduating with her ADN [associate degree in nursing degree], she signed up for both the Maryland Medical Reserve Corps and MIEMSS‘ ‘Nursing Clinical Extern Portal’ and has already served on the front lines at the VEIP-turned COVID-19 testing center in Waldorf. Windsor called the experience that had her administering 25 tests the first day, and 30 tests the second day, ‘eye-opening.’

“It was very controlled,” she explained. “It was good to visualize it and learn as much as I possibly could from seasoned nurses. I know there is tremendous value in what I am doing right now, because in three or four months, after I graduate, I will be caring for COVID-19 patients as a nurse in the field, not as a nursing student.”

Windsor said her classes picked up the pace with pandemic training, as well.

“In our clinical settings now – even though we’re online – we are doing pandemic scenarios,” she said. “Our instructors went right to work to deepen our knowledge.”

“To say I am proud of our faculty and students for stepping up to help in every possible way, would be an understatement. We strive to promote students’ commitment to their respective health profession and the community, and it has been amazing to see them respond,” Polk said.

Coronavirus Update

CSM last week announced that it will maintain a virtual learning environment for its students for the rest of the spring semester and faculty and staff will continue to operate remotely through May 31. CSM’s campuses remain restricted to pre-approved and authorized personnel. This date may again be extended as CSM stands united with the nation in the fight against the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Along with limiting public access to campuses, CSM has made several operational changes that can be tracked at ready.csmd.edu/covid-19/. Please visit the website often for resources and updates.

Students should make sure they are monitoring their CSM student email accounts, as well as the MyLearning course shells for their individual courses, and stay in close contact with their professors if they have any questions about their courses.

CSM remains in close contact with local, state and federal authorities, and will share information as quickly as possible when and if these new operating conditions change.

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