BC3 nursing students gain "once-in-a-lifetime" experience serving community during pandemic

March 8, 2021

Mackenzie Dean, of Dayton, a student in Butler County Community College's Nursing, R.N., program, administers a COVID-19 vaccination to Patricia Nunamaker, 89, of Cabot, at Butler Memorial Hospital's COVID-19 clinic Feb. 23. More than 80 BC3 registered nursing students from four counties are gaining once-in-a-lifetime experience by serving the community as volunteers at the clinic that inoculates up to 1,200 visitors a day.

(Butler, PA) Nearly a year after Butler County Community College donated personal protective equipment to healthcare workers at the outset of a global pandemic, its registered nursing students are gaining "once-in-a-lifetime" experience – experience uncommon among nursing schools, they add – as volunteers serving the community at a COVID-19 clinic inoculating up to 1,200 visitors a day.

Brittney Barnett, Mackenzie Dean, Michele Gaiser and nearly 80 others from the Nursing, R.N., program on BC3's main campus are assisting senior citizens from Butler Memorial Hospital's parking lot and into

its nearly 3-month-old COVID-19 clinic that is providing vaccinations against a virus that has claimed more than a half-million American lives.

BC3 students are also reviewing visitors' vaccine lot numbers, dates and sites of inoculations on the 4-inch by 3-inch COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card issued by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They're administering vaccinations. And they're monitoring visitors for 15 minutes after inoculations.

"We have a pandemic, and these students may or may not ever have the opportunity to do something like this again," said Dr. Patty Annear, dean of BC3's Shaffer School of Nursing and Allied Health, herself a clinic volunteer at Butler Memorial Hospital.

"It's the community coming together, for the betterment of the greater community," Annear said. "Butler Memorial Hospital is a community hospital. BC3 is the community's college."

"The BC3 students are serving a great need"

Phase 1A inoculations under the state Department of Health's four-tier vaccine rollout plan include senior citizens such as Patricia Nunamaker.

Nunamaker, who uses a walker, was met outside Butler Memorial Hospital by Gaiser, 53, of Evans City, who assisted the Cabot resident to the clinic.

"One was clear out in front by the street," Nunamaker said of Gaiser. "She came and helped me in."

Michele Gaiser, of Evans City, a student in Butler County Community College's Nursing, R.N., program, prepares to administer a COVID-19 vaccination to John Ingham, 78, of Cranberry Township, at Butler Memorial Hospital's COVID-19 clinic Feb. 23. Gaiser, a former resident of Ford City, is among more than 80 BC3 registered nursing students from four counties who are gaining once-in-a-lifetime experience by serving the community as volunteers at the clinic that inoculates up to 1,200 visitors a day.

Brittney Barnett, of Saxonburg, a student in Butler County Community College's Nursing, R.N., program, prepares to administer a COVID-19 vaccination to Marianna Miller, 75, of Cranberry Township, at Butler Memorial Hospital's COVID-19 clinic Feb. 23. More than 80 BC3 registered nursing students from four counties are gaining once-in-a-lifetime experience by serving the community as volunteers at the clinic that inoculates up to 1,200 visitors a day.

Dean then administered the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine to Nunamaker, 89 and one day shy of her 70th wedding anniversary.

"The BC3 students," said Karen Allen, chief nursing officer, Butler Health System, "are serving a great need by helping us to staff all of these different areas."

Many BC3 Nursing, R.N., students have administered approximately 50 doses of the vaccine per shift and under the supervision of Butler Memorial Hospital registered nurses. BC3 students from Armstrong, Butler, Lawrence and Mercer counties are volunteering in shifts as long as six hours.

Volunteering "says a lot about them individually"

Brittney Barnett, left, of Saxonburg; Michele Gaiser, of Evans City; and Mackenzie Dean, of Dayton, students in Butler County Community College's Nursing, R.N., program, are shown outside of Butler Memorial Hospital's COVID-19 clinic Feb. 23. More than 80 BC3 registered nursing students from four counties are gaining once-in-a-lifetime experience by serving the community as volunteers at the clinic that inoculates up to 1,200 visitors a day.

As a requirement in BC3's 70-credit career program, students make rounds at hospitals as part of clinical training in which they inoculate patients with prescribed medications under the supervision of college faculty or registered nurses. Students in clinical training volunteered to assist Butler Memorial Hospital and have had the opportunity to receive inoculations, Annear said.

"What we have been doing as students volunteering is trying to lend a hand," said Dean, 21, of Dayton, a 2017 graduate of West Shamokin Junior-Senior High School. "It has been amazing how many people from the community have come to get the vaccine. The interesting part is when we get to administer the vaccine. It's really cool to be a part of something that will go down in history.

"The fact that I was able to be a part of what potentially in the future could end this horrible virus was just an honor to me."

Like Nunamaker, John Ingham and Marianna Miller received a second dose of the vaccine from BC3 registered nursing students Feb. 23.

"It says a lot about them individually that they are doing this," said Ingham, 78, of Cranberry Township. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Feb. 23 is a few days shy of her birthday, said Miller, 75, also of Cranberry Township.

"I think it's wonderful they are helping us out," Miller said. "We really need to be able to get these injections. It's been horrific. So many problems for so many people in so many ways. It's unbelievable."

As is the experience of serving the community as volunteers during a pandemic, said Barnett and Dean, first-level students in BC3's two-year program.

"Volunteering in a history-making situation"

"I have some friends in nursing school and they haven't even mentioned being able to do this," said Barnett, 23, of Saxonburg, a 2016 graduate of Knoch High School.

Added Dean: "I have friends who go to other nursing schools and they don't get to do this. This isn't something their schools offer the community. They don't set them up at the hospitals to help with clinics. Everyone was amazed when I told them what I was doing. They said, 'That is honestly so cool that you get to do that.'"

Said Gaiser: "We are volunteering in a history-making situation. We are. It's probably going to be once in a lifetime for us."

Michele Gaiser, of Evans City, a student in Butler County Community College's Nursing, R.N., program, is shown at Butler Memorial Hospital's COVID-19 clinic Feb. 23. Gaiser, a former resident of Ford City, is among more than 80 BC3 registered nursing students from four counties who are gaining once-in-a-lifetime experience by serving the community as volunteers at the clinic that inoculates up to 1,200 visitors a day.

Some senior citizens fought tears of happiness as they sat in folding chairs, their sleeves raised as they prepared for their inoculation, Dean said.

"They just kept thanking us over and over," Dean said, "saying how excited they were to be getting this and how grateful they were for us and for what we were doing for them."

"Just so grateful they got a vaccine," Gaiser said. "They have some type of protection now."

Early in the pandemic, BC3 contributed gloves, isolation gowns and surgical masks to assist healthcare workers at Butler Memorial Hospital and at Concordia Lutheran Ministries, Cabot.

"We have had a real outpouring of support from our community," Allen said. "BC3 is an example of that. Even Dr. Annear herself said, 'I'll come and work at the clinic.'"

Which Annear did Feb. 11.

Syringes containing Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine are shown Feb. 23 at Butler Memorial Hospital's COVID-19 clinic. More than 80 students from four counties in Butler County Community College's Nursing, R.N., program are gaining once-in-a-lifetime experience by serving the community as volunteers at the clinic that inoculates up to 1,200 visitors a day.

BC3 Nursing, R.N., students serving the community as volunteers are …

BC3 Nursing, R.N., students who have chosen to volunteer at Butler Memorial Hospital's COVID-19 clinic are:

Robert Specht, Boyers; Naudia Ahmad, Heather Bane, Marissa Baptie, Kristen Barkus, Sydney Daugherty, MacKenzie Fields, Mary Gall, Krista Hartle and Kathryn Hartzell, all of Butler.

Also, Julia Kleinfelder, Alexi Krajnikovich, Casey Kretzer, Victoria Lassinger, Ashleigh Lumley, Frances Martin, Ian Miller, Carley Patten, Austin Reay and Bethany Rhodaberger, all of Butler.

Also, Morgan Richards, Sarah Russell, Kassandra Smith, Clairise Snyder, Lindesy Stover, Nicholas Stutz, Jacob Tirk, John Tuka, Sarah Vasas, Lauren Wade, Julia Williamson and Jaela Yohe, all of Butler.

Also, Rachel Boltz, Brooke Dingel, Carrie Dingel, Autumn Trempus, Jeremy Brown, Jenna Corcelius, Kaitlyn Fleeger, Tara Geibel, Olivia Mourer and Alyssa Weibel, all of Chicora.

Also, Jessica Hoover and Rhiannon Morin, Cranberry Township; Mackenzie Dean, Dayton; Michaela Buxton, Michele Gaiser, Bailey Lewis and Nichole Miller, all of Evans City.

Also, Allison Chronister, Fombell; Christina Denardo and Caitlin Montgomery, of Ford City; Chelsie Kerns, Grove City; Abigail Kingerski, Harmony; and Joy Davis and Alexandra Gray, Harrisville.

Also, Natasha Myers, Jamestown; Bailey Anthony, Crystal Bowser and Johnathan Brake, Kittanning; Abigail Branan, Manorville; Nichole Hillman and Chelsea Walker, Mars; and Amber Graham, New Castle.

Also, Anna Van Gent, New Wilmington; Brianne Jordan, Numine; Olivia Girdwood, Portersville; Taylor Gilliland and Brooke Peterson, Renfrew; and Lily Keller, Sandy Lake.

Also, Kaylee Comperatore, Kylie Godlewski, Lainey Malak and Veda Reiser, all of Sarver; Bailey Barnett and Brittney Barnett, of Saxonburg; Brandan Horstman, Slippery Rock; Amanda Olesnevich, Valencia; Skylar Bowers, Volant; and Kelsey Ripley and Lauren Wiles, West Sunbury.