

CNHP Students, Alumni Battle COVID-19 & Tornado Head-On

4/3/2020

JONESBORO – Students, faculty and alumni from the College of Nursing and Health Professions (CNHP) Emergency Medical Services Program at Arkansas State University are on the front line fighting the COVID-19 pandemic as well as helping victims of the tornado that struck the city of Jonesboro, Saturday, March 28.

“Our paramedic students are very involved in the COVID-19 response,” said Sara Walker, director of A-State’s Emergency Medical Services Program. “Our paramedic students are actively working on the frontlines as EMTs at their respective ambulance agencies. As of now, I believe each of our students has been in direct contact with COVID-19 patients. They have been incredible in their response as professionals and also in their studies as a full-time student.”

Walker received a bachelor’s degree in 2012 in history and earned a master of science degree in disaster preparedness and emergency management 2015. The EMS program is a part of CNHP. She became a licensed emergency medical technician in 2001 and has been active in the field of EMS as a paramedic for more than 18 years.

Walker also has extensive experience on both the air ambulance and ground ambulance. She holds credentials as an EMS instructor, basic life support (BLS) Instructor, advanced cardiac life support (ACLS) instructor, national disaster life support (NDLSF) instructor, and pre-hospital trauma life support (PHTLS).

“I went into work on Saturday night immediately following the tornado and jumped on an ambulance with Emerson Ambulance Service personnel,” continued Walker, who also serves as the health and medical director for the University Emergency Operations team. “We set up medical staging in the mall parking lot and then dispersed throughout the city in some of the harder-hit areas for medical support. Fortunately, there were no fatalities and very few minor injuries that night.”

Allison Russom of Knobel, another A-State alum, is a paramedic with Emerson.

“For COVID-19, we are taking every precaution we can to prevent being exposed to the virus,” said Russom. “So, we wear gloves, masks and gowns. We have forms we have to fill out for each patient presenting the symptoms that we leave with our paperwork at the hospital and at our offices. We disinfect everything at the beginning of our shift and after every patient, which is normal even when there isn’t a pandemic.”

Russom noted that she takes every precaution after her shift to personally ensure not spreading the virus to her family. She disinfects everything at home from the time she arrives until she showers and washes her uniform.

She also mentioned she immediately drove to Jonesboro once she received news about the tornado destruction.

“Both events had a slim chance of happening but they did, and at the same time. This is weird to say, but it was a good thing though because any other normal Saturday in Jonesboro, many of those businesses would’ve been packed. It would have caused many more injuries.”

Graduates from CNHP degree programs are in demand. Programs hold national professional accreditation and are clinically affiliated with over 500 health facilities across the region including hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, public schools, outpatient facilities, sports health agencies, extended care facilities, private practice clinics, industrial settings, wellness clinics, health maintenance organizations and government agencies.

“We are very fortunate that our community asked us to develop an EMT and paramedic program,” stated Dr. Susan Hanrahan, dean of the CNHP. “Our graduates are already making a difference. Sara Walker is to be commended for the development of such a quality program. We continue to thank the community for their support of our educational efforts.”

Russom added, “I can say without a doubt, if I hadn’t been a part of Sara’s EMS program, I don’t think I would’ve been prepared mentally or physically for either event. The instructors were wonderful teachers and they made sure before we left the program, we were confident in ourselves and in our skills. We studied and practiced every day we were in lecture or lab. Because of this, I felt more prepared going out on my own. I am forever thankful for Sara, her program and Arkansas State.”

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