

SIUE Nursing Student Travels to New York to Treat Coronavirus Patients in ICU

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE – The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Nursing (SON)’s mission is to educate and develop care providers and leaders who will meet the health challenges of a diverse and complex world.

That mission rings abundantly true as nurses and other healthcare professionals bravely work on the front lines of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, offering skilled, compassionate care for patients in critical need. SON Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) student, Brooke Buffington, RN, of Staunton, is one such professional.

Buffington has selflessly agreed to travel to New York to bring help and relief to patients and her medical colleagues who are “overworked and emotionally stressed.” She departs Friday, April 10 through NuWest travel, a travel nursing group that arranged the opportunity.

“I chose to pursue a career in nursing, so that I could serve people in their most vulnerable state,” Buffington said. “I will be working in one of the Intensive Care Units (ICU) treating COVID patients at NYC Health+Hospitals in North Central Bronx. My contract is at least four weeks long. I will be working a rotation of seven days on with two-day breaks in between.”

Buffington earned a bachelor’s in nursing from SIUE in 2017, and began the DNP FNP program in 2018. She is slated to graduate in May 2021. She has worked in healthcare for five years, first as a student nurse technician in a cardiothoracic ICU and then as a registered nurse in a cardiovascular ICU.

Her decision to aid in New York will leave her juggling healthcare service and her studies. Upon learning of Buffington’s plans, SON lecturer Greg Jennings, MS, APRN, FNP-C, noted his first reaction was one of admiration. Jennings and DNP program director Valerie Griffin, DNP, PPCNP-BC, FNP-BC, PMHS, FAANP, have discussed ways to allow Buffington to take a pause and then complete her studies, and continue through the program as scheduled.

“What Brooke is doing is truly amazing,” Jennings said. “I know her skills will be put to good use, and she will help save many lives. She has been trained for this, both with her education and on-the-job training.”

“Brooke’s new work schedule is going to be extremely demanding, and even though she has two days off, those days are going to need to be spent recovering both mentally and

physically,” Jennings noted. “She is going to see, experience and feel things she may never have before, and will need to process that. As important as school is, she felt an internal calling to help others, and we in the School of Nursing support and respect that.”

“When students apply to our FNP DNP program, they participate in an interview session,” Griffin added. “At this session, even before being accepted into the program, applicants are told that SIUE faculty will work with them in various manners to help them be successful in this program. If that means a student needs time off to care for a sick family member or whatever the reason, our goal is to see those students cross that stage with their degree in the future.

“Brooke’s request to serve patients and other healthcare providers in New York is an example of compassion and love, the core of why nurses are so proud of this amazing profession. In this past month, I have seen human kindness reflected in many ways, and Brooke’s decision to request time off from her program to volunteer in this manner is an exceptional act of kindness.

While doing her part, Buffington hopes the public will stay home and practice social distancing to help flatten the curve of COVID-19.

“It’s important that we think about the many families who have been affected by this pandemic, as well as the numerous healthcare professionals who are working tirelessly to treat these patients,” Buffington said. “My hope is that everyone will do the best that they can to stay safe during this very difficult time.”

The SIUE School of Nursing’s programs are committed to creating excellence in nursing leadership through innovative teaching, evidence-based practice, quality research, patient advocacy and community service. Enrolling more than 1,700 students in its baccalaureate, master’s and doctoral programs, the School develops leaders in pursuit of shaping the nursing profession and impacting the health care environment. SIUE’s undergraduate nursing programs on the Edwardsville campus and the regional campus in Carbondale help to solve the region’s shortage of baccalaureate-prepared nurses and enhance the quality of nursing practice within all patient service venues. The School’s graduate programs prepare nurses for advanced roles in clinical practice, administration and education.

Photo: SON Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) student, Brooke Buffington, RN, of Staunton, earned her bachelor’s in nursing from SIUE in 2017. She is traveling to New York to work on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.