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PUBLIC HEALTH NURSES PLAYING VITAL ROLE IN H1N1 RESPONSE

(RICHMOND, Va.) – Public health nurses have been an important part of the state’s response to health emergencies including the current presence of the H1N1 influenza virus in Virginia, a point underscored today by Virginia’s Health Commissioner, Dr. Karen Remley, MD, MBA.

The Commissioner was in the Department’s Fairfax Health District on Thursday for National Nurses Week and to call attention to the role of public nurses in protecting public health. This year’s theme is “Building a Healthy America.”

“Small outbreaks could become much larger if it were not for public health nurses,” Commissioner Remley said. “They provide services to their communities that most Virginians never know about, filling the gap between individuals with health needs and the delivery of proper care. They often go to extraordinary lengths, including home visits, to ensure that those who are ill are receiving the tests, medication and treatment they need, when they need it, to ensure a healthy recovery.”

The Commissioner presented JoAnne Jorgenson, R.N., MPH, in the Fairfax Health District with an award as the Virginia Department of Health’s Public Health Nurse of the Year for 2009. Jorgenson’s work in creating the Fairfax Office of Emergency Preparedness has helped the district respond to the presence of the new H1N1 A virus in the local community and illustrates one focus of all public health nurses: preventing and limiting the spread of disease. The Fairfax Office of Emergency Preparedness has provided training on public health preparedness to more than 100 clinicians.

Jorgenson’s contributions during more than 35 years of service in the Fairfax Health District has included the creation of an Office of Strategic Planning to ensure the Fairfax Health Department continues to meet the community’s growing and changing health care needs. She also helped to develop a culturally competent integrated delivery system for uninsured Fairfax residents and has been successful in the mobilization and strengthening of community partnerships.

Other VDH finalists for this year’s award included Gail Sutler, Nurse Manager, Chesterfield Health District, the Central Region’s Public Health Nurse of the Year; and Delores Paulding, PHN Supervisor, Norfolk Health Department, the Eastern Region’s Public Health Nurse of the Year.

(More)

Public health nurses have been an important part of health emergency responses since the specialty was established nearly 100 years ago. They were instrumental, for example, in flu containment efforts during the pandemics of 1918 and 1968. They are playing a similar role in current efforts to contain the H1N1 outbreak by monitoring information from area hospitals, looking for common signs and symptoms that indicate a potential H1N1 case and conducting health education outreach.

“Nurse Jorgenson has especially been effective in building partnerships in her community,” said VDH Director of Public Health Nursing Joanne Wakeham, R.N., Ph.D. “Her leadership typifies the contributions that public health nurses make on a community-wide scale whether in times of crisis or in resolving every day needs.”

Public health nurses are in high demand today and VDH offers several scholarships to help pay the cost of nursing school. For more information about careers in public health nursing, visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/nursing.

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