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American Red Cross volunteers work throughout hospital



By Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO

Last year the American Red Cross on Fort Carson had more than 250 volunteers who logged more than 45,500 hours.

"Our volunteers fill roles from administrative all the way up to licensed and credentialed doctors," said Gabrielle Skovira, the American Red Cross service manager for Evans and Fort Carson. "They are spread out throughout most of the clinics, with the highest concentration working in the hospital pharmacy."

"It means a great deal to have volunteers in the pharmacy," said Maj. Gary Falzone, chief of the Evans Department of Pharmacy. "Having volunteers helps free up our technicians so that they can manage other duties and they provide excellent care to our patients."

Falzone said that when the pharmacy receives a refill shipment the volunteers put the new medications on the shelves. But their main duty in the pharmacy is working at the refill window."

"Having the volunteers has been a huge help. We would not be as successful as we have been without them," said Falzone. "But it also gives the volunteers a sense of community involvement and lets them get a taste of military camaraderie."

"A lot of our volunteers are looking for a way to give back or contribute to the community, said Skovira. "Most of them are connected to the military, some are retirees or spouses, but we also have active duty Soldier and civilian volunteers."

Skovira said that the reasons for the volunteers giving of their time are varied. A lot are looking to add experience to their resume, licensed/credentialed volunteers are here to keep their skills active, while others do it to fill their time while the kids are in school.

"We have quite a few people that work their volunteering hours around school schedules," said Skovira. "Our biggest concentration of volunteers is between the hours of 10 and 2, because that is when kids are in school and so they are available to come in."

Dr. Norman Cole didn't have to worry about volunteering at Evans around his children's schedule – they have been out of the house for a long time. But, volunteering almost 1,000 hours last year got him out of the house and gave him something to do.

"I retired from private practice in 2014 and going from a really busy 60- to 80-hour week to nothing didn't make any sense to me," said Cole. "With those hours I had very little time left over to even think of volunteering. Now I have the opportunity, so I do it and working here with the military is and I enjoy working with the military."

Cole is no stranger to the military. In the 1970s Cole was going to medical school and enlisted in the military so that he could finish his degree as well as not get drafted.

"I signed up and Vietnam ended before I finished school," Cole said. "I spent three years in Nuremburg, then three years here at Fort Carson."

When his enlistment was up, he decided to stay in Colorado Springs and started his private practice.

"I always thought I would wind up back here and volunteering is a good way to do it," said Cole. "Forty percent of my volunteering time is normally in the OB/GYN clinic, but I also do 12-hour shifts in labor and delivery and I also do some surgeries."

While some Evans volunteers are continuing their medical career after retirement, others are just beginning their life in medicine.

"We have a summer youth volunteer program where 30-40 teenagers spend their summer assisting throughout the hospital," Skovira said. "In October Abigail Doris was awarded the Fort Carson Youth Volunteer of the Quarter Award for her 322 hours she spent last summer serving the EACH community in the emergency department."

Skovira said those hours should help her next year when she goes off to college to study premed.

"We are always looking for new folks to volunteer," said Skovira. "While our biggest presence on Fort Carson is at the hospital, for those who have the

constraint of not being available while the clinics are open, the Red Cross does have people that are working on other things around post.”

Volunteers can join the American Red Cross’ briefing and outreach team which is at pre-deployment briefings, Family Readiness Group meeting and post events like Destination Fort Carson.

Volunteering through the American Red Cross is only open to DoD ID card holders or credentialed persons. Those interested in becoming a Red Cross volunteer can call their office at 526-7144. Or, stop by their office near Evans’ west entrance in room 1011.



American Red Cross volunteer Donna Bilderback checks to make sure a patient gets all of his refills at the Evans main pharmacy. Bilderback has volunteered at the hospital for four years. Photo by Jeff Troth