

## Making Every Minute Count as a Student- Pay it forward

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The environment and society students live in are immersed with political, religious, financial, economic and personal struggles that often create an internal turmoil that can be a confliction. This is not how Directors want students to perceive our future as Respiratory Therapist and the resolve on students to make a difference now and how each can impact today's society. One can reasonably ask, "What have you done for your community today, this week, month or even this year?" The average provider or respiratory therapist spends 36-48 hours a week in employment duty tasks and another 20-30 hours a week on family and personal affairs. At what point, can one expect to serve their community and volunteer for organizations that might need support and service. Students in Respiratory Programs are exposed to many avenues of stress, frustrations and struggles with homework, countless clinical hours and a delineation of compounded family, financial and personal difficulties while attending School. What more can any program asks for students to do that can make life much more difficult and much more strenuous. How much more time can one program ask students who are already exposed to countless hours of work and education to do? I believe the answer lies in the human spirit and what each medical student provider was trained to do. The answer lies in our humanistic being and what is hidden or forgotten in today's society. We are alive to do care for those who cannot support themselves. We are breathing to make a difference and make an impact in someone's life. The act of caring, respect and fondness to serve those who truly need our support and compassion is a vital element that sometimes becomes forgotten. As students or even providers, elements of time are often the key asset and reasons that are utilize in excess of what not to do [1].

A volunteer is described as an act of compassionate care where one exposes themselves fully to a specific task, action or program without payment or benefits but rather act of self will. The Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2014 stated "The volunteer rate was little changed at 25.3 percent for the year ending in September 2014, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. About 62.8 million people volunteered through or for organization at least once between September 2013 and September 2014. The volunteer rate in 2013 was 25.4 percent.

Students in respiratory programs are directed by many countless hours of didactic and clinical information. How can volunteerism be implied as an important factor in any education? After all, time is money and volunteering can only impose more work really? The act of "Volunteerism" is articulated in every Respiratory Therapist. The term volunteer is much more than commitment [2]. It is learning through active participation. It is creating knowledge, customer service and recognition of internal awareness. It is compassion through work. It is embracing cognitive and physiological awareness and a proportional direction of sympathy through community activities. Volunteerism is not a feeling of wanting to help but learning strategy students can embrace and outcome based.

Respiratory School is a difficult process for students. There are many factors that can create internal and external stress. Respiratory-Practitioners that have completed programs either 2 or 4 year are often so stressed throughout the program that they forget the importance of what led them to this career. Saint Paul College is a 2 year accredited program located in Saint Paul, MN. There is a vast cultural diversity and even an outward vast complexity of multicultural and social economic challenge that is imposed in our program. The program entails 2 years of didactic and over 1000 clinical hours not including a semester of Simulation Based Studies and 1 year of Research Based Clinical Study [3]. Compounded with this is the intensity of the programs strict didactic learning and continued exam policies. As with most schools, why would one even consider volunteering when they should be focused in education?

As a veteran in the military, Service members have been exposed to many acts of courageous acts in the military team. The author has seen acts of compassion when the end was to be abrasive for any soldier to take. The author was exposed to actions of care and during the war, seen and took part in acts of bravery. All were in many ways volunteerism. Not one soldier said no and in no way, left anyone behind. The same compassion, attitude and perseverance hold a very important aspect in my heart for respiratory care students. As a program director, it is so important that the interpretation of care is not textbook driven but rather implementation of what is the heart (Caring). It is expressed to all students the importance of giving back to the community. In giving back to the community, students can gain better insight to what they believe to be important and what can sometimes be lacking that no textbook can teach.

We, as Americans are exposed to many aspects in the American Culture where struggle, pain and stress are placed on families in everyday life. In a recent article from Peter Levine, director of CIRCLE, said "young people without college experience are underutilized and underestimated: "Studies show all young people want to get involved in their communities, and lack of college experience should not be the deciding factor," Levine said. "Schools, communities and government need to create more opportunities for all young people, not just the ones with a college education. Volunteering and participation in civic life is an important part of society, and no one should be excluded from an opportunity to do so." Often days, seem so quick that we forget the moments that might have taken our breath away or moments that cannot be re-captured. Sometimes, the saying of time is money becomes more important and take time and smell the fresh air. As Americans, we are given certain rights and ailments that protect our way of living and how we live. Equally as much, as a Respiratory therapist, we provide the breath of life that most people seem to take for granted or unknowingly seem to bypass and ignore what we really do. As a program director, it was important for me to show students how important life is and how important their profession is.

In the very first year of student enrollment, I asked my students a simple question "What motivates you?" What inspires you? What makes you want to be a respiratory therapist? Often, I get the same answers initially. Money, more time with family, 2nd career choice or even Career change. All are great answers but sometimes it is much more than this. After all, we are in the field of healing. Have we forgotten the value of love and respect and giving forward? I ask my students another set of questions, what motivates you to care? What inspires you to treat patients? What makes you really want to be a therapist?

The answer is Volunteerism. The task is simple and not complex. The idea is to promote awareness to students far beyond educational didactics. I ask my students to do 8 hours each semester to any organization that inspires them. I believe tasking them to a volunteer organization is the wrong answer. As a professor, I state, choose an organization where you can grow as a Respiratory Therapist and learn something unique and new. Choose an organization that inspires you to be a better student, better provider and better person. Students are often confused and state why. The answer is selfless service. Learn to give back to your community and learn the identity of human nature. In knowing this, the psychosocial aspect of loving, caring and nurturing will come natural and make each student a better practitioner. I believe that an educator can teach any student concepts, theories and values. Good educators can embrace respiratory therapist to be knowledgeable and critical minded. However, the best educators need to inspire students to understand the value of human culture, pain and suffering. There are many survivors out there and many organizations that need support and awareness. There are many reasons to care about patients but volunteering can inspire students to develop the emotional, psychosocial, physical and demanding attributes of love and compassion. This trait embraces a therapist and can provide a resolving developmental trait that is needed for today's human suffering.

### **Adding Total Time is Easy and can be accomplished**

To date, Saint Paul College averages over 2,500 volunteer hours within the last two years above the clinical and didactic hours. Students both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years are given the opportunity to choose charities, programs or organizations that support their growth as medical providers. This might seem a lot but in reality, it is only 8 hours in a semester and in turn 40 hours year. Adding up all the students and their hours can make a difference and in turn create a better unification and awareness of growth. Students have chosen Special Olympics, Breast Cancer, COPD and Lung Awareness, Cystic Fibrosis Organizations Autism Awareness, Veterans and Wounded Warriors. Feed My Starving Children and countless other organizations. Students have expressed the importance of caring and compassion making there

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clinical experience more unique. Students have taken time to understand hospice care and palliative patients knowing the importance of compassion. Students have taken time uniquely different in acute ACLS, PALS and BLS giving more time to understand the compassionate side of caring and the importance of not giving up. The unique nature of Saint Paul College is that students learn the perspective of love and caring by volunteering for organizations that need our support and help. In turn, our advisory groups have been exposed to countless organization supporting our educational learning. Communities have created a better awareness of a multidimensional compassion of Respiratorytherapist far beyond the hospital environment. As an organization students have gone on to be leaders of groups and community activities in supporting awareness of organizations that they have compassion for. In turn, students, have given more time knowing the importance of being a provider than just books and clinical. They learned to value and importance of selfless service and organizational needs that might need our help.

Students of Saint Paul College over the last 10 years have logged over 10,000 hours of community service of volunteerism. Students of Saint Paul College continue to expose themselves beyond the didactic and clinical aspect and with them continue to grow not only as an expert in pulmonary care but a humanistic and compassionate being. Volunteering is an important part of any organization and I implore you to move your college and make a difference in this world. I challenge everyone to make a difference and help make this great nation unique by volunteering for those that need our support.

### Bibliography

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