

MEDIA RELEASE

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Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) Give COVID-19 Vaccines in Groundbreaking Program

HILLSBOROUGH, N.C. February 8, 2021 — Nearly a year into the pandemic, the vaccination phase has proved to be a logistical challenge for many local governments. Many struggle to find qualified personnel to administer vaccines. In order to meet this challenge head on, Orange County, North Carolina decided to take an innovative approach.

Emergency Medical Technicians, often referred to as EMTs, far exceed the number of paramedics in any given county but typically are not allowed to administer vaccinations. Both EMTs and paramedics have the knowledge and skills to transport patients and provide them with emergency care. Paramedics are required to go through over 1000 hours of training while EMTs complete almost 200 hours. In already stressed emergency services departments this has led to a shortage of people who can administer vaccines.

Dr. Joseph Grover the Medical Director for Orange County Emergency Services recalls, “We already have a massive paramedic shortage nationally. Up until the pandemic vaccinations were not in scope of practice for EMTs. I wrote a protocol to allow the practice and the state Office of EMS approved a temporary scope of practice change for EMTs. They are already well trained to administer shots for allergic reactions or for opioid overdoses. So, why not train them to administer vaccines?”

In anticipation of the arrival of the vaccines, Orange County Emergency Services worked to create a model for mass vaccination by participating in the Health Department’s flu clinics in October. The EMTs were able to jump right in and do the work. Any EMT or paramedic credentialed in Orange County was eligible to participate, with many volunteers from the different fire departments and South Orange Rescue Squad participating, including Orange County Emergency Services. Once the first vaccines arrived in December 36% of the workforce preparing and administering syringes were EMTs. 45% of the staff actually administering vaccinations were EMTs and paramedics represented another 16%. If it were not for their participation, staffing would have been a difficult barrier.

John Herrera a bilingual EMT with Eno Fire Department said, “I am proud to participate in the first mobile vaccination campaign in Orange County with a great team of dedicated public health professionals. I am confident we will beat this pandemic. I look forward to help vaccinate essential workers that are at great risk of exposure every day, like farmworkers, frontline workers and the rest!”

“We enjoy a fantastic relationship here in Orange County between the Health Department and EMS, along with county leadership. We all work closely together and play to each other’s strengths,” said Dr. Grover. “Our hope is that this can be a model that will be used nationally in order to get our community vaccinated as quickly as possible using skilled EMTs as well as paramedics.”

Related Graphics

Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) John Herrera administering a COVID-19 vaccination to New Hope Fire Chief Charles Bowden.



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