

LEE COUNTY MEDICAL RESERVE CORPS: REACTIVATED TO RESPOND TO A COMMUNITY IN CRISIS

BY: Julie Ramirez, CAE

BY: Carl Schultz, DO

In the aftermath of Hurricane Ian, the Society was presented with many opportunities to help our physician and patient community. One opportunity came to us from the **Broward County Medical Reserve Corps**, who reached out and asked how their volunteer physicians could help. When this occurred, the Hertz Arena shelter to be closed and the evacuees redistributed elsewhere. The thought was that surely there is a need for health care for injured patients on one of the islands.

After a few phone calls, we discovered that Fort Myers Beach had a state-organized emergency clinic; Pine Island had the Cajun Army; but Sanibel Island was without any medical care team. With this knowledge, retired member **Dr. Carl Shultz** contacted **Lee County EMS** and asked how volunteer doctors could start seeing Sanibel residents and workers. They were kind enough to set up an air-conditioned mobile trailer, FEMA supplies and Starlink Satellite internet in front of the Sanibel Island Fire Station #1.

We then began recruiting physician volunteers to help staff the temporary Sanibel "clinic". The clinic opened on November 1st with Fort Myers Beach native **Dr. Tyler Spradling** volunteering. I had permission to cross the newly repaired bridge and, once at the mobile trailer, helped to direct calls and people that came in for care.

The first day proved there was a definite need so we recruited several other Lee County physicians to volunteer. Thank you to **Dr. Catherine Law** for spearheading the scheduling process, creating onboarding paperwork and volunteering multiple times a week; **Dr. Carl Schultz** for volunteering several times a week as well; **Dr. Jeff Halsell** for his weekend volunteering, and **Dr. Krista Zivorvik** and **Dr. Amber Jandik** for rounding out the team. The clinic was open for six weeks and closed right before the holidays. After the holidays, Lee Health was able to open an clinic and serve patients.

Because our attention was on getting the clinic staffed and quickly serve the community, we had to backtrack because we needed to protect our volunteer physicians with Sovereign Immunity, which comes from the Florida State Health Department. I want to thank **Angela Smith**, Health Officer/Administrator at Florida Department of Health in Lee County, and **Megan Widman** for greatly assisting us in acquiring the Sovereign Immunity and resurrecting the **Lee County Medical Reserve Corps!**

I received an email from LCMS that they were looking for volunteers to staff their clinic. Having been a Sanibel resident for six years, I was excited to help. As a retired Emergency Physician, this seemed like the ideal opportunity. There had to be a reason I kept my medical license active all these years, right?

We saw approximately 70 patients in the roughly seven weeks we were open. We administered lots of vaccinations, as well. All of our patients were either homeowners or hired help that were on the island to clean up after Ian. Most of our patients had some sort of injury, or minor illness. Our biggest impact was that if someone came in with a two-inch laceration, we were able to stitch them up and have them back at their worksite in an hour. If they had to go to the ER, with another coworker to drive them, they would have been gone for the rest of the day. Two workers, lost for the day.

Since we weren't paid, sovereign immune, and there were no insurance issues, the paperwork was minimal. Simple SOAP note, in and out. The way we wish we could practice, and the way some of older doctors remember. On my last day, my last patient had a ragged deep puncture to his lateral right leg from an aluminum pipe. I thought, this should probably go to the ER. And then I thought, well, heck, I'm an ER doc! Unless they need an X-ray, I have all the tools and experience I need to treat this right here. It took a while to clean it and repair it, but we got it closed. The doctor in St. Louis who removed the sutures said it looked great. What a great way for an ER doc to end his career!

We all remember why we entered medicine, regardless of what specialty we chose. Our clinic on Sanibel gave me the chance to renew my enthusiasm for my profession. A chance, after many years, to converse with patients and to offer assistance and reassurance. And money was never any part of it. Because I left Emergency Medicine due to a disabling injury 12 years ago, I never got the satisfaction of a real retirement. I finally got that reward on Sanibel. Thank you, LCMS.

