

**VERA****Volunteers to
Expand
Rheumatology
Access****AMERICAN COLLEGE
of RHEUMATOLOGY**
Empowering Rheumatology Professionals

Volunteer Your Care

What have you gained through volunteering?

"Volunteering allows me to provide consultative service to patients who otherwise would not have access to Rheumatology care. I have the opportunity to teach medical trainees about our subspecialty and hope to inspire the trainees to become rheumatologists of the future. I have also had the opportunity to educate my primary care colleagues—and in this way improve access to Rheumatology care." —**NINA D. SCHWARTZ, MD**

"Volunteering with the Indian Health Services (IHS) learning about their cultures and beliefs, and the intersection between traditional medicine practices and my practice in Boston, and partnering with the outstanding and dedicated IHS providers has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career. I feel that I can truly make a difference in the lives of the patients by helping to diagnose and treat diseases early before the debilitating manifestations occur." —**CANDACE FELDMAN, MD, MPH, ScD**

How have you helped patients through volunteering?
"I was able to help a physician who was uncertain about how to follow his new patient with Psoriatic Arthritis on a biologic. Without my counsel the patient would have to be off the biologic agent until he could get an appointment in 4-6 months at a nearby university center."
—**G.C. BERNHARD, M.D., FACP, MACR**

How does volunteering benefit clinics?

"Since we opened in 2011, our clinic has not been able to treat or manage any rheumatological conditions due to a lack of expertise. We have seen everything from rheumatoid arthritis to fibromyalgia to Bechets disease. As you can imagine, these diagnoses are very expensive to treat for an uninsured person. The American College of Rheumatology's VERA Initiative will make an incredible difference in patients' lives! Thank you very much for the compassion."
—**KATIE CAMERON, SPECIAL PROGRAMS COORDINATOR, FAMILY COMMUNITY CLINIC, LOUISVILLE, KY**

How do you volunteer?

"I found that Community Health Care, in Tacoma Washington, a federally sponsored network of public clinics, was the perfect match for medical professionals who wished to donate their time and expertise. I started a weekly rheumatology clinic and saw patients along with residents from the clinic's family practice program. This was beneficial to the clinic's patients, who previously had very little access to rheumatologists in the community,

and the family practice Residency gained a rotation through which bedside teaching of rheumatology's differential diagnoses as well as therapeutic injection skills could be demonstrated." —**ROBERT ETLINGER, M.D.**

"I have been fortunate to be able to use my skills in a volunteer capacity outside of my suburban/urban practice, both through remotely assessing patients without access or ability to pay for rheumatologic care, and by teaching or mentoring their caregivers through a remote electronic platform [The MAVEN Project*]."

—**KATHERINE S UPCHURCH, MD**

**Learn more about Dr. Upchurch's involvement with the MAVEN Project (Medical Alumni Volunteer Expert Network) by watching this [PBS News Hour video clip](#) from October 17, 2018.*

How often do you volunteer?

"As a rheumatology attending, I spend about one week a year in Gallup, NM, and for my last visit, in Shiprock as well, and I communicate regularly throughout the year with providers at both locations to help manage challenging cases and to receive updates on the patients I see when I am there. When I go, I give lectures to the frontline providers and work in a "precepting" role so that the primary provider who is caring for the patient participates actively in the history, examination, assessment, planning and follow-up." —**CANDACE FELDMAN, MD, MPH, ScD**

At what point in your career have you volunteered?

"I have recently realized the ultimate reward for my volunteer work: I have been able to continue to be immersed in the field of rheumatology even after official retirement from my practice." —**KATHERINE S UPCHURCH, MD**

"As a rheumatology fellow, I began to volunteer in the telemedicine program the Brigham and Women's Hospital set up with 4 Indian Health Services (IHS) sites helping to discuss and manage rheumatologic cases and giving presentations on topics of particular relevance to the outstanding IHS providers." —**CANDACE FELDMAN, MD, MPH, ScD**

How have you maintained licensure and medical malpractice insurance while volunteering?

"The Washington State VRP, [Volunteer and Retired Providers], Program has been very supportive, as it provides members with free medical licensure as well as free medical malpractice coverage so there is no out-of-pocket cost to me." —**ROBERT ETLINGER, M.D.**

If you currently volunteer your time to improve access to rheumatology care, we would love to hear about your experiences! Please send us an email at VERA@rheumatology.org