A Day in the Life of a COVID Vaccine Champion

MARILYN D. HARRIS, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN

Tarik Khan, RN, FNP is a family nurse practitioner, a colleague, and past president of the Pennsylvania State Nurses Association. I had the opportunity to interview Tarik on May 23, 2021 about his efforts to administer COVID-19 vaccine to homebound patients in Philadelphia, PA area. His experiences have been shared in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the May 17, 2021 issue of *People Magazine* and national television including Good Morning America.

What motivated you to choose nursing as your professional career?

My mother was an emergency room nurse who influenced me to become a nurse. I continued my education by becoming a family nurse practitioner and am a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing with the goal of influencing health policy. My mother also became involved with COVID-19 testing in nursing homes and for first responders and we have worked together on COVID-19 vaccine administration.

How did you progress to where you are today as a family nurse practitioner?

From my experiences with my mom and her nursing colleagues, I knew that nurses were “really cool and did amazing and heroic work.” I started my career at Roxborough Hospital School of Nursing, a diploma program, and worked with patients with heart failure. I fell in love with

the one-on-one patient relationship and learning about people and their concerns. I was laid off due to budget cuts as I was getting my master’s at LaSalle University as a clinical nurse leader, so I transitioned to becoming a family nurse practitioner. After graduation I worked in that role for 3 years with adults with intellectual disabilities who lived in the natural home setting in Washington, D.C. I loved that role but I missed my home city-Philadelphia. In 2015, I began my current position with the Family Practice and Counseling Network Abbottsford-Falls office in Northwest Philadelphia.

What motivated you to expand your role to administer what you call “Angel Doses” of vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccine vials need to be administered in a timely manner before they expire. As a volunteer with the Philadelphia Health Department in the early days of testing and vaccination, I helped to pair unused and unexpired vaccines or “angel” doses with people who needed them. With the help of Anna Perng, founder of the Philadelphia COVID-19 Health Equity Coalition, a network of advocates and civic and religious leaders, we worked to identify individuals with disabilities, family, caregivers, and others who were unable to leave their homes to get vaccines. Although Anna coordinates the patients, I’ve been driving across the city after work and on days off to administer angel

doses to these individuals. To date, we’ve vaccinated over 350 “homebound individuals.”

It is important to note that our most vulnerable, those with disabilities and their caregivers, continue to be ignored by government and do not have access to basic healthcare like the COVID-19 vaccine. Our policy advocacy was a huge factor in making more doses available to homebound patients and expanding vaccinations to a coordinated city-wide effort led by the health department.

Please share your advice to home healthcare nurses in 2021.

Don’t be afraid of your power! Nurses can be change agents with relentless advocacy for their patients at the bedside and beyond. Our advocacy efforts with governmental agencies and healthcare facilities resulted in policy changes and increased access to the vaccine.

Tarik, thank you for sharing your experiences related to your tireless efforts with administering COVID-19 vaccine to individuals in their homes. Your commitment to meet your community’s needs during the pandemic is truly commendable. ■

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