Bay Area Medical Academy Students Gain Rare Real-World Experience Testing for COVID-19

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif., June 30, 2020 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) — A recent community-led effort to test San Francisco residents for COVID-19, including the unhoused populations in Bayview and Sunnydale/Visitacion Valley gave Bay Area Medical Academy (BAMA) phlebotomy students first-hand experience administering COVID-19 testing to underserved populations.

PHOTO CAPTION: Jorge Quijada, a Bay Area Medical Academy phlebotomy student participated in the COVID testing initiative sponsored by United in Health D10 in San Francisco.

A critical part of students’ phlebotomy training is externships, usually in a lab or a doctor’s office, but in recent months these opportunities halted as hospitals and labs closed down access to students and postponed all elective and preventive procedures. However, through a broad community partnership called United in Health D10, which included UCSF, San Francisco Department of Public Health (SDFPH), Bay Area Phlebotomy and Laboratory Services (Bay Area PLS), and other community partners, BAMA students were able to complete
externships and gain real-world experience in performing COVID-19 testing and drawing blood for COVID-19 antibody testing, while administering to underserved populations of African-American, Pacific Islander, Chinese, and LatinX residents in San Francisco.

Anne Williams, 57, a resident of San Francisco, just completed the BAMA phlebotomy training and was one of several students who participated in testing by performing venous punctures for blood collection for the COVID-19 antibody test in challenging outdoor settings—a school yard in Bayview, a baseball field in Visitacion Valley/Sunnydale, and a closed Bayview street working with the homeless and partially sheltered. According to Williams, the weather ranged from rain to incredibly strong winds that threatened to overturn the tents, to 95 degree heat while completely covered in layers of PPE. One patient jokingly referred to it as “fresh air phlebotomy.” In spite of conditions, Williams felt it was a valuable experience.

“I felt like I was doing service in my community and a political action, rather than just a stepping stone toward getting my license,” said Williams. “The heartfelt thank you’s and gratitude we received made the work more than worth it. I ended up feeling like I got more back than I gave.”

Typically, BAMA Phlebotomy students take 60 hours of class training and then 2-4 weeks of an externship in a clinical setting. Class training focuses on skills such as collecting blood using needles, documenting and identification of samples, hygiene and infection control protocols, and safe handling and transport of samples—much of which pertain also to COVID-19 and antibody testing. The students’ work was overseen by doctors, nurses, and other specialists as part of United in Health D10, and students performed approximately 100 tests each.

The community testing initiative has proven valuable to BAMA which was in danger of being unable to find enough externships for students during the lockdown. Now, three of the participating students have been offered jobs, as a direct result of participating in the externships, with Bay Area PLS, according to CEO Salu Ribeiro.

After talking to a range of participants, Ribeiro believes there were added benefits to these unusual externships, including the fact that “students gained experience serving a diverse community and had exposure to technical challenges that develop their resilience required to become strong medical professionals.”

BAMA founder and CEO Simonida Cvejic agrees. “Bay Area Medical Academy is about meaningful community impact, through empowering and training students for successful entry in the healthcare field but also through contributing to the healthcare of our community and this COVID19 testing project has provided us exactly that,” Cvejic said. “In alliance with Bay Area PLS, our students got a chance to experience working in the front lines of the COVID19 testing, research and prevention.”
PHOTO CAPTION: Student Elizabeth Dore from Bay Area Medical Academy recently completed phlebotomy training and participated in the effort.

Ribeiro expects the opportunity and others like it to continue. “We want to express our gratitude for being able to provide this service to the residents in San Francisco,” Ribeiro said. “These students will be doing serial antibody testing with other projects – and we will be recruiting more BAMA students in the future.”

About Bay Area Medical Academy

Bay Area Medical Academy (BAMA) provides healthcare career training created in partnership with employers. We prepare individuals from different socio-economic, cultural and educational backgrounds for careers working in the healthcare industry. BAMA’s goal is to serve its students and the medical community through quality academic instruction and job-oriented, skills-training. We maintain a student-centered philosophy and use both traditional and innovative means to train our students. Bay Area Medical Academy is committed to the success of its students, believing that education is the best way to transform people’s lives.

Bay Area Medical Academy ranks in the top 10% of B-Corps (benefits corporations) based on our rigorous standards of social performance, accountability, and transparency. We partner with social agencies to help
people who face social barriers attend school. We also collaborate with STEP into a Job!™ to provide scholarships to high school seniors.

Learn more at https://www.bamasf.com

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