



UCSF Department of Medicine ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL

CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITY WITH OUTREACH AND ACTION

In this 2020 holiday season, in which we are necessarily distanced due to COVID-19, we are celebrating initiatives started in the ZSFG Department of Medicine that exemplify our commitment to the community. The initiatives reach beyond the walls of our hospital and clinics to address social determinants of health and improve the lives of San Francisco residents, patients, and their families in our community.

EatSF Providing Sustenance

In providing vouchers for nutritious foods to low-income city residents, the [EatSF](#) program nourishes not just individual health but community wellbeing. The program has a "triple aim," increasing supply and demand for fruits and vegetables in underserved neighborhoods, supporting healthy eating, and decreasing food insecurity.

Founded in 2015 by Hilary Seligman, MD, Professor, Division of General Internal Medicine,



Hilary Seligman, MD

in partnership with the San Francisco Board of Supervisors' Food Security Task Force, the program has expanded nationally under the Vouchers 4 Veggies banner, and has created a strong network of program corner stores, grocers and farmer's markets.

"Voucher programs are a really elegant targeted strategy to help people prevent and manage chronic disease and these are the patients we see commonly at ZSFG," said Dr. Seligman. "Virtually everyone who comes through our doors is at risk for obesity and diabetes and other diet-sensitive chronic diseases. What I experienced as a provider is that many patients really wanted to have better

diets and improve consumption of fruits and vegetables but just didn't have the finances to do it. They were perceived as a luxury."

As COVID-19 has brought both increased isolation and financial disparity, EatSF has ramped up its efforts, supporting 6,000 households in San Francisco with vouchers, just between May and June of this year. "In the midst of the pandemic, we found that EatSF is a really important infrastructure to have in place because not only could we distribute vouchers good for fruits and vegetables, but also rapidly distribute vouchers that were redeemable for any food at all which was important at the beginning of the pandemic due to shelter-in-place and now the economic recession with skyrocketing rates of food insecurity."

Dr. Seligman appreciates the emotional wellbeing this voucher program provides as well. "Food plays an important role in identity and this is what makes voucher programs so strong," said Dr. Seligman. "You go to the grocery store like everyone else and get the foods that you want like everybody else. And if your dentures don't fit then you can spend your money on what helps. If you hate bananas and you've always wanted more tomatoes, then that's fine. Whatever works for you. People respond to the ability to shop in their neighborhood store and choose the foods that they want very positively. We as physicians need to support these solutions that give people a sense of dignity."



San Francisco farmer's market vendor accepting EatSF voucher.

photo: EatSF

Trainees Help Patients To Vote

UCSF residents have worked in assisting hospitalized voters and staff since at least 2016. COVID-19, however, posed a challenge to the usual program as campuses flexed resources, with no program in place two weeks before election day. When Ilana Garcia-Grossman, MD, ZSFG Primary Care Medicine Resident, realized that potential voters could be left without resources, she sprang into action, mobilizing a team of five residents and one medical student to facilitate emergency absentee voting. Fellow residents Sarah Burbank, MD; Jessica Dong, MD; Irving Ling, MD; Smitha Ganeshan, MD; and medical student Marissa Savoie coordinated quickly while on different schedules to pull the voting event together.

"I had heard that the UCSF volunteer office would be coordinating at UCSF campuses, and a faculty member was doing it at the VA, but no one was planning here (at ZSFG), and especially this year we couldn't afford not to," said Dr. Garcia-Grossman. "Illness is actually a fairly common barrier to voting, especially in the subset of those 65 and older or those who are very low income. In 38

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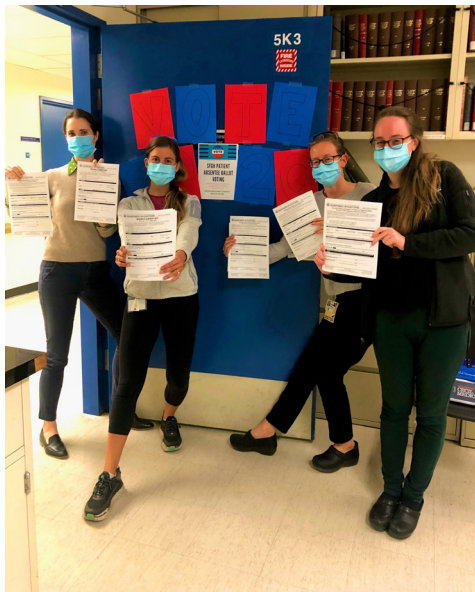


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states, those with a medical emergency or hospital admission can request an emergency ballot. California is one of those states, and not just a family member, but a third party, including hospital volunteers, can request and help.”

The SF Department of Elections provided additional support, designating one of their own volunteers on election day to shuttle ballots to voting headquarters. Ultimately 40 medical students, graduate students, fellows, and faculty volunteered in shifts before and during the election.

“I’m grateful to hospital leadership who were immediately excited and wanted to support in any way possible,” said Dr. Garcia-Grossman. Informational signs in three languages were put on meal trays and hospital TV broadcast notices. In addition to visiting door-to-door to inpatient hospital rooms, volunteers consulted with the Emergency Department and Psychiatry to reach patients.



Voting Volunteers (L to R): Raphaela Lipinsky Degette, MD; Anna Fretz, MD; Ilana Garcia-Grossman, MD; Meredith Adamo, MD

“Most of the voters here were socially isolated and didn’t have family or friends nearby to help. I think the visitor restrictions of COVID have a role too,” said Dr. Garcia-Grossman. “We had a number of first time voters. One man in his fifties said, ‘I haven’t voted in 30 years, but I needed to make it happen this year, and I wouldn’t have been able to do it without you.’”

The program was able to request 64 ballots and submit 47, with 83% from hospitalized patients, 8% from patients’ family members, and 9% from staff.

Dr. Garcia-Grossman views voting access as another arm of providing healthcare. “Broadly, elections have historically been outside of the purview of medicine and health but are so interconnected and so many are impacted by social determinants of health,” said Dr. Garcia-Grossman. “Elections are one way we can make an impact. There are so many local elections that directly or indirectly impact health. On a more individual note, we can see just how empowering it is for people to participate in their civic right. This is an example of how healthcare providers can make an impact.”

Making the Wish List Come True

Now in its 11th year, the Annual Toy Drive spanning multiple campus sites, began with just one staff person, Olive Giovannetti, Research Services Manager and Contract and Grants Officer. In 2010, Ms. Giovannetti, then a Research Financial Analyst for the Division of Experimental Medicine, approached the division’s quality of life committee with her idea of the toy drive, enlisted three volunteers and stationed boxes on the 5th and 6th floors of Building 3. When Ms. Giovannetti later joined Research Management Service (RMS), the toy drive expanded quickly. The same core group has continued to volunteer, including Vanessa York in Experimental Medicine, who has been involved each year. Additional volunteers are comprised from Research Management Services-Team E, Industry Contracts, and Government Business Contracts.

The drive arose out of the intention, when struck by gratitude, to give back. “I became pregnant at age 38 and this was my way of thanking the universe,” said Ms. Giovannetti, who values the



UCSF Toy Drive 2019 volunteers with gifts for foster youth: Steve Dudum, Tiffany Takade, Julia Saelee, Scarlet Giovannetti, Vanessa York, Olive Giovannetti

drive for the unconditional care it bestows. “There was a year when I was a kid, where we didn’t really have Christmas...but I had my family. Foster youth maybe don’t get a present, but also may not have family in that way.”

Although the toy drive has primarily supported foster youth in partnership with Mattress Firm, this year Giovannetti shifted in deference to COVID-19 safety guidelines and worked with a local Girl Scouts troop. Giovannetti appreciated that the program allows foster children to create a wish list from which donors can select to give. Donors could contribute in multiple ways, from completely online with items or gift cards shipped directly to the organization to contact-less drop-off at the Girls Scouts’ Camp Ida.

“I will do the toy drive as long as there are any number of donations coming in. If we can make any child feel better, I want to make that happen,” said Ms. Giovannetti. “I want that kid to know that we may not know you, but someone thought of you, someone cares enough and you are loved in some fashion. I hope they know that and feel that. And that the person who donated gets to ethereally feel that as well.”

Donate to the Annual Toy Drive online through Dec. 23: <https://www.mattressfirmfosterkids.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=donorDrive.personalCampaign&participantID=2623>

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