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DHMC Therapist Part of Superstorm Sandy Response Effort

By John P. Gregg Valley News Staff Writer

Friday, November 9, 2012

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Lebanon — A respiratory therapist from Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center and an emergency room nurse from the North Country are among the medical responders from northern New England who are part of a federal team treating victims of Superstorm Sandy in New York City for the past nine days.

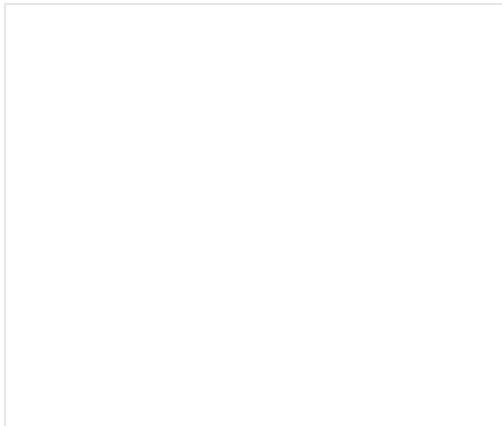
Robert Fishwick, who commutes to DHMC from his home in Allentown, N.H., said he has been helping treat patients for asthma, high blood pressure and other symptoms that may be related to the stress of their dislocation.

Fishwick and Lynda Paquette, an emergency room nurse at Weeks Medical Center in Lancaster, N.H., are among 17 members of a "New Hampshire-1" team working at an emergency shelter at Lehman College in the Bronx.

Many of the residents in the shelter lost their homes from Sandy-related flooding in Coney Island and in New York's Rockaway Peninsula.

"A lot of people here have lost their homes. They have nothing," Fishwick said in a phone interview yesterday. "They are showing signs of stress, their blood pressure is up, and there is the general anxiety that goes along with this type of disaster."

A number of patients came from nursing homes or skilled-nursing facilities.



“We are seeing a lot of hypertension because they are off their meds, and (blood) sugar, because they don’t have their insulin,” said Paquette, who commutes to the Coos County hospital from her home in Bloomfield, Vt.

The New Hampshire-area team deployed with a similar team from Connecticut as part of the National Disaster Medical System, overseen by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The northern New England responders have special

training in providing care in winter environments.

Fishwick said the team, who become temporary federal employees once activated, arrived in New York City early in the morning of Oct. 31 and “have been taking care of all kinds of patients.”

The medical personnel erected five portable field hospital tents at the Lehman College campus, which is part of the City University of New York system and served as a hurricane evacuation zone.

The responders have been working 12-hour shifts, and Fishwick said the work has been intense.

“It’s been very rewarding here,” said Fishwick, who said he bought one shelter evacuee a simple winter hat, and the man gratefully shook his hand.

There are 18 children also at the shelter, and Fishwick said Joe Girardi, the manager of the New York Yankees, has come by twice with his wife to unload “bags and bags and bags of clothes.”

“(People) give New Yorkers a bad name. Everyone here has just been absolutely amazing,” Fishwick said.

Paquette, who went to Haiti on a relief mission after the catastrophic earthquake in 2010 there, said she has helped treat people “with a lot of psychological issues because they don’t have their meds.”

Working near a disaster zone has “been really hard to deal with, but we give them the best support we can,” she said.

As many as 110,000 people in the New York area remain without power following Sandy, and Mayor Michael Bloomberg yesterday instituted even-odd-day gas rationing to deal with shortages.

As many as 70,000 homes in the city may have been damaged by the storm, though most are still structurally sound.

Paquette said the environment was different in New York than Haiti, of course, but the issues are similar, though the New Yorkers may feel even more traumatized. “They have more to lose in New York than they did in Haiti,” she said.

Most members of the New Hampshire-based team plan to return home tomorrow.

Fishwick, a former hospital corpsman in the Navy who has traveled around the world, said he is going to tell his two daughters, 11 and 5, “how lucky we are, and to never take

the little things for granted.”

“It’s been really touching,” he said. “We need to do this. We need to be here. If we don’t take care of each other, no one is going to take care of us.”

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