Georgia Southern students, health officials collaborate for inaugural drive-thru flu clinics

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Georgia Southern University master of public health and doctor of public health students recently partnered with the South Central Health District, the public health authority for 10 counties in middle Georgia, to make getting flu shots a little easier.

“Roll In, Roll Down, Roll Out,” was the slogan for the two inaugural drive-thru flu shot clinics that enabled community members in Wheeler and Treutlen Counties to receive flu shots without leaving their cars.

“Drive-thru clinics are important to the community for many different reasons,” noted Jessica Schwind, Ph.D., epidemiology professor in the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health (JPHCOPH). “These clinics encourage community members to get vaccinated against influenza, which is still a major cause of sickness and death in the winter across the U.S. Additionally, it serves as an emergency preparedness exercise for community members in case the health district needs to rapidly dispense immunizations or medications. Should a public health emergency arise, an informed community is an empowered community.”

Students in a social epidemiology course earned credit hours for participation and created a proposal for the successful development, implementation and evaluation of drive-thru flu clinics. They also learned valuable lessons in public health initiatives, as South Central Health District’s Jodi Bazemore spoke to students about preparing communities for emergency pandemics.

“Participating in the Wheeler County drive-thru clinic opened my eyes to the importance of such clinics in rural counties,” stated doctoral student Brian Buck, who hopes to continue research on these clinics in the future. “It not only helps in developing these important relationships between the community and healthcare providers, but it also provides much-needed access to influenza vaccinations in underserved rural counties.”

The mission of JPHCOPH is to improve health, eliminate health disparities and health inequities of rural communities and underserved populations globally through excellence in teaching, public health workforce development, research, scholarship, professional service and community engagement.

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/Research institution founded in 1906, offers 141 degree programs serving more than 27,000 students through nine colleges on three campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville and online instruction. A leader in higher education in southeast Georgia, the University provides a diverse student population with expert faculty, world-class scholarship and hands-on learning opportunities. Georgia Southern creates lifelong learners who serve as responsible scholars, leaders and stewards in their communities.