



National Black Nurses Association, Inc.
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Dr. Martha A. Dawson
President

Giving VOICE to Nurses on the Front Lines in the Fight Against the Coronavirus

(April 9, 2020 – Silver Spring, MD) On Thursday, April 9, 2020, the Greater New York City Chapter of the National Black Nurses Association, Inc., held a special program entitled, **“VOICES from the Front Line: A Virtual Town Hall on the State of Nursing During Covid-19”**. The innovative forward thinking virtual zoom meeting brought together 145 participants consisting of nursing leaders, educators, deans, administrators, students, researchers, and elected officials to hear the stories and testimonials of nurses working on the front lines in various New York City hospitals with Covid-19 patients. The main objective of the meeting was to organize a forum that would allow nurses the opportunity to share their experiences working in the **epicenter** of the coronavirus pandemic in the United States.



Dr. (Hon) Millicent Gorham
Executive Director

Introductory remarks were brought by **Dr. Martha A. Dawson** the national NBNA President. Dr. Dawson provided an overview of the various activities that NBNA is doing across its 114 chapters to support the fight against the coronavirus. She also addressed the reports of increased deaths among African-Americans from Covid-19 and the historic levels of health disparities that appear to be an underlying cause of the disparate number of deaths.



Dr. Sheldon Fields
NBNA Board Member
and Chair,
Health Policy Committee

Words of comfort and high praise for the work of the nurses were expressed by the following elected officials who participated in the call: Councilman **Donovan Richards**, District 31, New York City Council and **Ruben Diaz Jr.**, Bronx Borough President.



Dr. Julius Johnson
President,
Greater New York City
Black Nurses Association

Stories and testimonials were offered by two nursing administrators **Jewel Adams** and **Natalia Cineas**, DNP, RN Senior Vice President, Chief Nurse Executive, NYC Health and Hospitals. Front line care accounts and challenges were offered by **Patricia Armand**, a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist; **Sharlene Chisholm**, a ICU staff nurse; and, **Jose Perpignan**, a ICU nurse who also works as a transplant coordinator. Issues that advanced practice nurses are facing were shared by **Monique Tarrant**, MS, MPH, RN, a clinical nurse specialist and **Edwin Torres**, MS, RN, FNP, a family nurse practitioner.

The following themes emerged from the nursing testimonials:

- The town hall served as a platform to elevate the voices of nurses on the frontline
- Models of care that are working and that are supportive of nurses were discussed
- Advanced practice nurses being redeployed to work as RNs can help, but needs to be done in ways that also support the advanced training of these nurses
- Mental health for nurses on the front lines is vitally important
- Ways to continue to elevate the voices of nurses and next steps were discussed
- The need to increase COVID-19 testing that is accessible in hard hit communities of color throughout NYC
- Ways to organize donations of food and other needed supplies to support nurses was also discussed
- PPE supplies in many places are limited and nurses are being forced to work in some precarious situations that are putting their lives at risk.

The virtual townhall participants also heard directly from educational leaders such as Peggy Tallier, EdD, RN, Dean, Harriet Rothkopf Helibrunn School of Nursing at Long Island University – Brooklyn, who talked about the challenges being faced by educational institutions to continue the education of current nursing students many of whom are also working on the front lines.

“This virtual town hall was a much needed event and we will continue to conduct them and do all that we can to support our chapter members” stated Dr. Julius Johnson, DNP, RN, the president of the Greater New York City Black Nurses Association, Inc.

Dr. Martha A. Dawson, NBNA president, added that one of the GNYC-BNA members provided a profound comparison of how the “healthcare war zone” differs from the military war zone”. “This young critical care (ICU) nurse stated that in the military we do not send our soldiers into battle without the proper protective gear or ammunition. However, in this COVID-19 war zone we are asking nurses to go to war against an unseen enemy without protection and in some cases lack of preparation. NBNA salutes all of our nursing colleagues who are giving 200% in the face of this pandemic and living their legacy of caring and giving.”

“What is happening in NYC with our front line nurses and the disproportionate impact of this pandemic on Black historically underserved vulnerable communities has highlighted the need for massive health policy reforms and updates to our public health infrastructure” stated Dr. Sheldon D. Fields, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, AACRN, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN , Chair of the NBNA Health Policy Committee, NBNA Board member, and Immediate Past President of the Greater New York City - Black Nurses Association chapter.