

Valley Regional Hospital's Dr. Juliann Barrett, DO, is on the Front Line in the Fight Against COVID-19

by Kris Richardson, Marketing Coordinator, Valley Regional Hospital

When Dr. Juliann Barrett, DO, joined the staff of Valley Regional Hospital in the fall of 2017, she was looking forward to being a part of a family practice in a small, tight-knit community where she could use her many acquired medical skills to take care of patients of all ages. Although her military career as a Major in the Army prepared her for almost any type of situation that might arise, perhaps a global pandemic three years later wasn't very high on that list.



Dr. Barrett came to Valley from the Army, where she served as the Sexual Assault Medical Director at Fort Drum in Watertown, NY, and prior to that, as the Assistant Medical Director at the Grafenwoehr Health Clinic in Germany. Dr. Barrett has ten years of post-graduate experience with emphasis on both inpatient and outpatient practice. She has a high degree of experience with outpatient procedures, women's health, pediatrics and medical acupuncture.

In addition, Dr. Barrett has advanced training in acute trauma management, teaching, leadership, and health care administration, and is consistently a leader in patient satisfaction and productivity. For these reasons and more, in early 2018 she was named Medical Director of the Primary Care Practices at Valley Regional Healthcare.

Fast forward to January of this year. The United States government was preparing for an onslaught of illness, and despite taking measures such as social distancing, closing of non-essential businesses, and outright quarantining, the threat was barely curbed. "Late March I was called to report to my unit in Somersworth, NH within 48 hours, and it has been a whirlwind ever since, traveling to the New Hampshire seacoast, Massachusetts, and now to Pennsylvania", stated Barrett on her deployment. "The team and people have been great! There was a steep learning curve- we have never done this in the Army before- but we are working through the kinks. We share a common goal, to help people, and when you have the same goals things usually work out for the best. We are from 18 different states from coast to coast. Army medicine has never been asked to be the "war fighter" before. We have never been asked to be the front line of defense, and this has been a historic effort that I am just proud to be a part of."

Asked about how well prepared she thought she was for such an enormous undertaking, Barrett says, "I trained to be a physician in the army, prepared for the worst of the worst, and I did this for a number of years. Since joining the reserves my current unit has been training for two years to be an active participant during a medical disaster in the USA, however we didn't expect it to be a pandemic. We were excited two years ago when we were given this honor to be the Defense Support of Civil Authorities medical asset and it is an honor now to help in any capacity that is asked of me."

Although full of experience and training, Dr. Barrett feels that she continues to learn every day from her experiences. "Every time I am asked to participate in a military mission/exercise, I always learn something new- a new motivational approach, a new way to instill teamwork. During this mission I think what I have learned most is communication skills in the height of emergency. I think all organizations are constantly needing to communicate better and I think the same can be said about Valley Regional at times. I will definitely bring back improved communication skills."

As scary and unpredictable a time as this is, Dr. Barrett and everyone at Valley feel hopeful about flattening the statistical curve, and confident that we will come out of this stronger and wiser. "COVID-19 has been a unique time in history, one that I hope none of us ever see again. It has tested our medical community, our patience, our resilience, but it has also shown that we continue to be a nation that, when times get tough, we often come together and do the right thing."

Barrett adds, "We are not out of the woods yet, and I will remain where the Army asks of me until they feel the threat is over or has been abated. But if we can come together as a society and remember that here in the Upper Valley we are fortunate to have endless miles of walking space, fresh air, and the benefit of a community who has done the right thing by maintaining social distancing, I think we can all be thankful for what we DO have right now. We will get through this and live to tell the stories to our grand kids."

"Valley is prepared to keep our community healthy, strong and cared for. I know that commitment continues even in my absence. That is why I am not worried about what is going on there and I can focus on my mission here."

All of us at Valley are deeply grateful for the work and sacrifice that Dr. Barrett, and all healthcare workers worldwide, are making to keep all of us safe, healthy and calm. "Of course we are all concerned about the possibility of a second wave, but we as a unit, we as a military, we as a health care community, will come together any way we need to help the people who need us."

And indeed we will.

