

Every Day, I Walk Away Amazed

CDC headquarters has been largely empty during the COVID-19 outbreak. In accordance with national guidelines, most CDC employees have been teleworking as part of social distancing efforts to prevent the spread of the disease.

But a handful of staff remain in the agency's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) from day to day. And for three months, one of them was Dr. Dana Meaney-Delman.

Dana served as one of the principal deputy incident managers, working closely with Incident Manager Dr. Jay Butler, who until recently led CDC's response to the outbreak. And while rows of empty desks in the EOC are a stark reminder of the ongoing pandemic, CDC has a team of "really talented rock stars" working tirelessly to protect the public, she says.

"This response has been challenging for many reasons, but particularly because there are so many unknowns about the spread and the effectiveness of prevention strategies," Dana says. "And the response is complex. We have to coordinate with other agencies in other parts of the government. But every day, I walk away from the EOC amazed at what our incredible staff can accomplish and their dedication, motivation and innovation."

From patient care to public health

If you talk to Dana, it is obvious that she is a New Yorker, having spent her first 30 years in Long Island. Her interest in medicine began in high school while working in a physician's office. She jump-started her career after high school, being accepted into a combined college and medical school degree program at SUNY Stony Brook School of Medicine. After medical school and residency, she spent 12 years as an OB-GYN in private practice and in academic medicine before she became interested in public health. She continues to practice clinically at Atlanta's Grady Memorial hospital as part of adjunct faculty at Emory University.

While working at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas, Dana was asked to write clinical guidelines for treating cancer in pregnant people, which ultimately inspired her interest in public health.

"Before that experience, I had never really considered public health as a career path, because I did not have much exposure to the field in medical school and residency," she says. "I always viewed myself as a clinician, with a passion to take care of individual patients, particularly those in underserved areas." But she noted that "a lot what OB-GYNs do every day is core to public health."

We screen for many diseases and conditions and promote prevention throughout the lives of women," she says. So in 2005, she decided to pursue a master's in public health while continuing to practice medicine and teach medical residents and medical and nursing students. While completing her MPH, she began working at CDC as a contractor, eventually joining the agency full-time in 2012.

A veteran of emergency responses

COVID-19 is the seventh response Dana has worked on. She participated in smaller emergency responses and played leadership roles in the Ebola and Zika responses. For Zika, she was deployed to the CDC response before the EOC activation and stayed with the response through the entire activation. Her

clinical expertise as an OB-GYN was critical for Zika, which can result in birth defects among children whose mothers had Zika virus infection while pregnant.

Her most recent experience before COVID-19 was leading the agency's response to the outbreak of [severe lung injuries](#) linked to the use of e-cigarettes. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, she helped CDC mobilize the EOC and stand up the incident management structure for a coordinated response.

"At the end of February, when it was pretty clear this was going to be a pandemic, I remember feeling an intense duty to serve," Dana says. "I was a little intimidated about what we were going to face, but we had done our many "dress rehearsals," and CDC needed leaders throughout the agency with response experience."

Helping people do what they do best

On the COVID-19 response, she met regularly with response leadership and task forces addressing different facets of the outbreak, consults with outside experts CDC taps for advice, and fosters cross-coordination and discussion of emerging issues within the response. She viewed her role largely as "helping CDC's incredible staff prioritize and encourage and help people do what they do best."

"We will get through this," she said as she rotated off the response at the end of June.

"We can't pretend it's not a very difficult situation, but we'll get through it together. CDC has provided the best recommendations and guidance, and we will continue to do so based on the emerging scientific evidence. The American people are listening and continuing to do their part to minimize the effects of this pandemic."

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/responder-stories/amazed-every-day.html>