

# Frontline News

1199 MEMBERS ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19



## WE DO NOT SUPPORT VACCINE MANDATION

In early June, New York Presbyterian Hospital announced plans to mandate the COVID-19 vaccine for all staff. In response, 199SEIU President George Gresham released the following statement: “We are not in agreement with a mandate of the COVID-19 vaccine. A hard-handed approach will not work and will only create greater frustration for the healthcare heroes who have been battling this pandemic every day for the last 15 months. We agree that vaccination is an important tool to help us move forward, but mandating vaccination is not, nor will it ever, be the answer.” 1199 has consistently refused to support mandating any vaccine, including flu shots. For more information or if you have been told by your employer that vaccines are mandatory, talk to your organizer or delegate.

## MEMBER STORIES: PHARMACISTS ON THE VACCINATION FRONT LINES



Ellen Mui-Tellado is a Pharmacist at Walgreens in Fresh Meadows, Queens. She is also a 1199 delegate. The Fresh Meadows neighborhood was very hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and includes Ortho-

dox Jewish communities that experienced COVID-19 outbreaks. Two management staff at Ellen’s pharmacy contracted COVID-19 and were very sick. Staff at Ellen’s pharmacy began vaccinating the community in March and, according to Ellen, it was initially “madness, as we vaccinated over 50 people per day. At the same time, we were filling out our regular prescriptions.” Eventually, the store brought on more staff to help with the extra workloads. Initially, customers complained about not being able to get the shot when

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WALGREENS

the pharmacy was only providing vaccines to people who scheduled appointments online or by phone. Now, Ellen’s work also includes convincing hesitant members of the community to take the vaccine. Many of the hesitant are waiting to see if there are longer-term issues with the vaccine. “I tell anyone who is hesitant that we all have to get the vaccine to keep everyone safe. The vaccines are safe, and waiting puts you and others at risk for serious illness,” says Mui-Tellado. “This past year-and-a-half has been a life changer for me and many others. I am trying to protect one person at a time, and I’ve vaccinated thousands. Some people have tears in their eyes.”



Pharmacist Urvi Teli works in a downtown Manhattan Rite Aide store. Reflecting back on the pandemic, Teli says it was a surreal experience, “Retail is not something people think of as health care. The city may have shut down, but our jobs continued and it was surreal to ride the subway alone, walk

the streets alone, and be one of the few people going to work.” But stores like Rite Aide became critical to the community and not just to make sure people still had access to medications. Teli’s site became the grocery store, the meeting place, and the place where people came to find out what was happening with the pandemic. “We lost a lot of patients, but we were there for people

and we became the eyes and ears for many who could not leave their home,” said Teli. Teli and her co-workers started vaccinations in late February, and just as everything about the pandemic was unpredictable, so was the roll out. There was tremendous demand for the vaccine as people

wanted to get back to seeing family and had a desire to get back to normal. “We had lines at the end of every day of up to 40 people hoping to get one of our unused shots. We told them we only had one or two a day but they kept coming” she says. Now, like most of the country, Teli is focused on overcoming vaccine hesitancy. “I’ve seen so many people get sick and not recover. You can come back from the side effects, but there is no coming back if you get sick and infect an older family member or friend who may not survive,” she warns. To help her community get back to normal Teli has administered between 10 and 200 shots per day since February and has protected thousands of New Yorkers. “At the time when everyone felt helpless, I was able to help. There is light at the end of the tunnel,” Teli says. “I hope everyone gets vaccinated so we can get there sooner.”

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