

Tarheel Footprints in Health Care

Recognizing unusual and often unsung contributions of individual citizens who have made health care for North Carolinians more accessible and of higher quality

Kathleen Colville, MSW, MPH Public Health Preparedness Coordinator, Alamance County Health Department



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Public health leaders are specifically charged with promoting and protecting the overall health and well-being of the population during emergencies. When an influenza pandemic arrives, it will be up to the state and local public health agencies and partner organizations to coordinate a public health response to help reduce morbidity, mortality, and social disruption. Local health departments have hired preparedness and response coordinators to prepare for natural or manmade disasters.

As a Public Health Preparedness Coordinator, Kathleen Colville, MSW, MPH, has taken the lead in coordinating the development of Alamance County's pandemic influenza plan. She convenes a community steering committee, provides training to community groups, health care providers, and health department staff, negotiates agreements with other agencies regarding roles and responsibilities during an influenza pandemic, and provides regional leadership through planning drills and exercises. These efforts will better enable Alamance County and North Carolina to respond to an influenza pandemic event when it occurs.

Ms. Colville has distinguished herself by working particularly on preparedness for marginalized populations and has been awarded several grants to reach out to low-income communities to address the unique challenges faced by these communities in the wake of a disaster. She has increased her own skills by volunteering in Florida after the devastating hurricanes in that state and by learning how to use geographic information systems to better survey and assess needs following catastrophic events. She also has learned to apply this technology to typical public health activities, such as community assessment. Dorothy Cilenti, Health Director at the Alamance County Health Department, noted that, "Kathy is a valued asset to the entire community in Alamance County, and as a result of her dedication and professionalism, we are better able to quickly respond to widespread disease or disaster."

Kathleen Colville came to her position in August 2005 after completing Master degrees in Social Work and Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She was named a North Carolina Schweitzer Fellow for the 2004-05 academic year for her service project conducting a community needs assessment in response to the elevated number of domestic violence homicides in Alamance County.

Marcy Green, Health Education Supervisor at the Alamance County Health Department, had these comments about Ms. Colville, "I think the number one quality of a Preparedness Coordinator is the ability to work well with different types of people as well as the ability to form strong relationships with community agencies. Kathy's personality and competence have been vital to building a strong relationship with our emergency management partners." Chip Ferguson, Director of Emergency Management at the Burlington Police Department, reiterated this idea. He described Ms. Colville as a true asset to the police department because of her tireless work to bring public health into the realm of public safety, a collaboration that previously did not exist. Ms. Green concluded, "If Alamance County were to face a small or large disaster, I feel much better knowing that we have Kathy as a leader in this area."

For her efforts and accomplishments in preparing Alamance County for an influenza pandemic, the Editors of the *North Carolina Medical Journal* are pleased to recognize Kathleen Colville, and all preparedness and response coordinators around the state, for their contributions to the health and safety of all North Carolinians.