

Florida Career College Faculty Fighting Coronavirus on the Front Lines

Miami patient care instructor Jose Muniz offers students a glimpse into COVID-19 reality, inspires them to meet this moment with bravery and a focus on helping the community



FCC instructor Jose Muniz (center) administers a trial vaccine to a study participant at a clinic in Miami

As the nation continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, the “frontline” health care practitioners who are battling the virus and its ravenous impact on patients face a daunting daily fight. Jose Muniz, BSN, RN, EMT is a nurse at Memorial Hospital in Broward county, which has been hit hard by the virus as South Florida became the epicenter.

Muniz and colleagues know they are putting their lives on the line, but they heroically show up every day. But, that doesn’t mean they are not worried.

“I honestly haven’t felt such a collective sense of fear among colleagues since serving in Iraq,” Muniz said. The veteran enlisted in the U.S. Army after high school and served a tour overseas with the 82nd Airborne Division during the Gulf War. “We are those crazy guys that jump out of airplanes into harm’s way,” he added.

Muniz says he never thought his training as a soldier would serve him as a nurse, but fighting the pandemic as a frontline caregiver certainly requires the bravery and perseverance of a

soldier on a battlefield. They might not be parachuting into the fight from airplanes, but they are jumping into harm's way.

"Doctors, nurses - and the broad range of support staff we have - are all concerned. We are all exhausted. But, we show up every day trying to help every patient fight this virus and survive. It has definitely been a draining experience physically, emotionally, and psychologically," he added.

Muniz knows a thing or two about psychology. After serving in the military, he earned an undergraduate degree in psychology and started his health care career working as a counselor, specializing on helping people who were in recovery from addiction.

"I was drawn to that field because of the experience of my cousin, who suffered from the disease of addiction," he said.

While his work as a counselor was rewarding, Muniz wanted to continue expanding his professional horizon in health care, so he completed EMT training and then transitioned to nursing as a licensed practical nurse (LPN). While working full time, he then became a registered nurse (RN) and completed a bachelor of science in nursing (BSN).

"Nursing is a wonderfully rewarding career and right now the community needs us more than ever," he said.

When he is not covered from head to toe in personal protective equipment (PPE) and caring for patients at Memorial Hospital, Muniz also works at a Miami clinic for Research Centers of America, where he has been administering a trial COVID-19 vaccination as part of a crucial research study.

"Vaccines usually take years to develop so it is very exciting to be part of this study and phase three, the human trial phase," he said. "So far there have been no major adverse reactions, so it gives me hope."

In his third professional role, Muniz teaches patient care courses at the Florida Career College (FCC) campus in Miami.

"I have a real passion for teaching, and it is a very rewarding experience to help train the health care workers of the future," he said. "For me it's like paying it forward because I had some fantastic instructors along my own career journey."

"I love teaching at Florida Career College and the diversity among the students at FCC. I can relate to many of them because we have similar backgrounds. I didn't grow up in a family of means, and I share their desire to build a better future for themselves with a career that provides a sense of purpose," Muniz added.

“For students, instructors like Jose are an invaluable part of their experience at FCC. He is a wonderful teacher who truly cares about his students, ensuring they receive the knowledge and hands-on learning that they need in order to be prepared. He takes his time with each one explaining every detail of what it takes to be a successful patient care technician - he doesn’t just teach it, he shows them,” said Marcela Munera, Executive Director at FCC Miami.

Muniz says he always seeks to set an example for students, who often have questions about being a frontline worker during the pandemic.

“I reiterate to them the importance of following every protocol for their own protection, and remind them to be constantly washing their hands, but self-care is equally essential,” he said. “Staying hydrated. Getting adequate sleep. Eating right. It seems so basic, but it’s so important.”

He also encourages them to never stop learning.

“I’m a firm believer that you can never stop learning, especially when you work in health care,” Muniz said. “That’s something that I try to instill in students. You always have to keep up with current information to stay ahead, especially during the pandemic, but beyond coronavirus there are new developments in patient care every day. Education has been key to my success.”

When it comes to that philosophy, Muniz is practicing what he preaches. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in nursing practice (DNP) degree at Florida International University, where he plans to focus on psychiatric care.

About Florida Career College:

Florida Career College (FCC) is an accredited, employee-owned post-secondary career education system with campuses locations in Florida and Texas. FCC offers programs in high-demand fields such as health care, business and skilled trades. Each program is designed to provide every student with the skills, knowledge, and training they need to be successful in their future careers. FCC programs are tailored to meet the needs of students with small classes. Students can train for entry-level careers and start building their future in as few as 10 months. For more information visit www.floridacareercollege.edu.