



# Health care administration grads lead long-term care facilities through COVID-19 crisis

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A dedicated group of Blugold alumni are charged with overseeing the care of some of the Chippewa Valley's most vulnerable residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The administrators of most nursing homes and other long-term care facilities in the area are graduates of UW-Eau Claire's health care administration program, says Dr. Jennifer Johs-Artisensi, professor of health care administration and chair of the program.

During the pandemic, these leaders are working 60-to-70-hour weeks as they address challenges like locating enough personal protective equipment for their staff, keeping COVID-19 out of their facilities and ensuring their residents' quality of life while keeping them safely distant from others.

"It's inspiring to see how effectively these Blugolds are responding during this crisis, and it's clear that going through our program helped prepare them for the challenge," Johs-Artisensi said.

A key component of UW-Eau Claire's health care administration program is the completion of a yearlong internship experience in a long-term care setting.

"That internship supports them in developing leadership and management skills to become leaders of senior care organizations," Johs-Artisensi said. "Students then put all those skills together by leading significant quality-improvement projects to implement and effect positive changes at their internship sites. The benefits of that internship program really shine through when you see our grads in action out there in our community."

One of those grads in action is Kendall Rosemeyer, a 2007 UW-Eau Claire health care administration alumna. She recently shared thoughts on her experience as the administrator at Dove Healthcare – West Eau Claire during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic:

**What has guided you and your staff in responding to the COVID-19 crisis?**

Dove Healthcare’s guiding principles have been our core values: trust, respect, communication and teamwork. These core values have been a part of and influenced my leadership since the day I started at Dove Healthcare – West Eau Claire in 2006 as an administrative intern from the UW-Eau Claire health care administration program. We work hard to keep these values at the forefront of our actions on a daily basis, and we have relied on these principles now more than ever with the COVID-19 pandemic to guide us and keep our team together and strong. They truly have an impact on our success.

**What have been the biggest challenges for you, your staff and residents in the face of the pandemic, and how have you arrived at solutions?**

If you ask anyone who works in the long-term care industry why they do what they do, they will tell you — without hesitation — it’s the residents. Their happiness and comfort is everything. So, when we had to tell them that their family, friends, church and all of our wonderful volunteers were not going to be able to visit for a while, and on top of it, we could no longer have group activities ... well, simply put, it was hard and we took it to heart.

Our team has really come together on this, though, and we’ve stepped up to this challenge by seeing it as an opportunity to push us to be even more creative and think outside the box on how we can ensure our residents remain connected and active. Every day we are helping with phone, window and video visits. We are posting fun pictures frequently on Facebook. We have a neat “message a resident” feature on our website for family to send their loved ones here a note. Personalized, one-on-one visits with their favorite activities or hobbies occur with more frequency, and we’ve discovered that bingo or exercises six feet apart in the hallway can be just as fun. Our team also ensured the traditions associated with St. Patrick’s Day and Easter continued. We’ve really learned to improvise and make the best of each day so that the things that are important to our residents can still continue, regardless what is going on outside our doors.

The advancement of technology has been a surprising highlight for our residents during this time. Not only have they been able to remain connected to their loved ones, but also they've been impressed by their ability to become familiar with technology that previously they would not have wanted anything to do with. Video visits bring so much joy for everyone involved, including our employees.

### **What are some ways members of your staff and others have gone above and beyond for your residents?**

We are blessed with an amazing family of caregivers, supporting each other and continuing to keep our residents at the center of all they do. You know, going above and beyond is wonderful, but in the wake of COVID-19, we've been reminded that it is truly the small things that seem to make the biggest difference. Making someone's coffee exactly how they like it, staying a few extra minutes to tidy up and chat, a smile, a hug, simply asking "Is there anything else I can do for you?" — all of these things go a long way in making someone's day a bit brighter and that is what's important.

### **How can people in the community help area nursing homes during this time?**

We sincerely appreciate the kindness and generosity of families and the community at large; our employees have been blessed by their gifts of food, special treats and gift cards to local restaurants. We have experienced a huge increase in mail delivery of cards, letters and artwork from kids, and this means so much to our residents!

We are asking for donations of surgical, N95 or cloth masks and medical/isolation gowns (disposable or cloth); we have posts with information about both of these items on our Facebook pages. Recently, the local Mask Beez group donated several hundred masks to multiple Dove Healthcare locations and Brent Douglas Flowers dropped off beautiful fresh flowers; we are so grateful. We encourage the community to continue to send cards and artwork to the residents, as well as donations of "independent" activities like word search or other puzzle books, simple crafts, large print books, etc.

### **Anything else you'd like to share about your experience as a nursing home administrator leading your staff and residents through this challenging time?**

Over the past 13 years as administrator at Dove Healthcare – West Eau Claire, I can safely say that this experience tops them all. When I say "tops them all," I mean an experience that has continued to shape the person I am and the team we have here. We have learned a lot about ourselves, our team and what we can persevere through when pushed to do the unknown and the uncomfortable. I think as a world, nation, state, county and community we can all find ways to take this experience and allow it to make us better and make a difference.

**Photo caption:** A dedicated group of UW-Eau Claire alumni, including Kendall Rosemeyer, administrator at Dove Healthcare – West Eau Claire, are charged with overseeing the care of some of the Chippewa Valley's most vulnerable residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.



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As part of UW-Eau Claire's Integrated Marketing and Communications team, Julie shares the Blugold