

## **Student Spotlight!**

Rozalba Gogaj



### **1. Tell us about yourself**

I am a second year student of MPH program, Global Health concentration. Since I was a child I wanted to be a doctor, so I pursued that career. I am an MD trained in Albania and my last three years have been working in research at NYU Langone. I love science and I want to give my contribution there. I am trying to have a healthy balance between my professional and personal life. I love animals, and our family is blessed with two cats: Joy and Happy!

### **2. What do you like about public health?**

Being a physician is taking care of the patient in front of you and his/her wellbeing. It is such an amazing job, but being a public health expert is taking care of a population. Public Health gives us the opportunity to solve global health issues, enjoy the challenges associated with fighting diseases and developing prevention programs. You will never run out of problems to solve in the public health field. Besides helping out at the community level, public health professionals are also involved in worldwide public health policy initiatives.

**Why are you interested in the field of emergency preparedness and response?**

I am a very detailed person and I like to think and analyze all that could go wrong in an event. Emergency preparedness and response has that characteristic within. The Emergency preparedness and response specialist is somebody that has to figure out how to prepare for a disaster or how to put the pieces back together after a disaster.

**3. Can you describe a project or experience that helped you in making a decision to pursue a career in this particular field?**

I worked in the Juvenile Detention Center in Albania for about 3 years. During my time there I faced different events that needed a lot emergency response preparation. I would mention one in particular that involved me with “the world of emergency preparedness and response”: Because of a security miscalculation and activity malfunction all the minors imprisoned at the time in the institution found themselves in the same outdoor area. This caused a really dangerous and aggressive fight between them. This was something that shouldn’t have happened, but it happened. Almost 10 minors were injured, and two of them looked that had really bad injuries. My team and myself (the physician in charge) had to treat all the injured and after the first quick medical assessment in the medical clinic of the prison, where I set the priorities about the wound treatment emergencies and treated myself the most injured ones, I needed to make sure that all other minors that the security guards decided to put in the cell (because they didn’t have blood anywhere) were safe and in a good health. During the medical assessment of the inmates in the cells, we found one of them that had vomited twice and was unconscious. We gave him the first aid and immediately send him for further examination in the hospital. He had signs of internal organ bleeding, and this can be life-threatening. The healthcare team and the psychologist of the institution managed the inmates after the event, for any post-traumatic signs and symptoms. I am not going into more details, but after we managed everything, we had to sit and analyze everything, what went wrong? Why? What could we have done better? Of course the meetings were multi-disciplinary and included the healthcare team, education, security, finance, law and the director of the institution. The aftermath of the event was than reported to the General Directorate of the Prisons. It was then decided that the staff needed training, protocols on prevention, preparation and response needed to be written, and a multidisciplinary team with experts from every field was created to write the protocols.

**4. Who do you consider to be vulnerable populations and why?**

I consider vulnerable populations the ones who are in some kind of disadvantage or risk compared to the other part of the world's population. A vulnerable population can be a chronically ill and disabled, low-income populations, homeless individuals, children and elderly, LGBTQ+ population, certain geographical communities. All the above populations need some specific public health measures, policies and programs in place in order for them to have a healthier, safe and quality life.

**5. What is a current emergency or disaster that you believe is critical to address?**

Having experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe it is important to address all the possible consequences of the pandemic. The mental health issues because of the pandemic, the financial issues, the social issues related to the pandemic (people are scared of going back to offices, bars, socializing), alcohol, drug addiction, divorce rates, domestic violence. The list goes on, but a lot of work it is needed.

**6. How do you handle stress and pressure?**

I react to situations, and don't think about stress. I keep myself busy, and try to avoid stress by planning ahead and prioritizing work, or life. I actually work better under pressure, because I love to challenge myself. If I find myself very stressed, I go for a walk or do something in nature. Nature relaxes me, and brings the positive energy back.

**7. If you could cure a disease which would it be and why?**

It would be the Ischemic Heart Disease, because it is the world's biggest killer. We would save 16% of the world's population that dies because of the Ischemic Heart Diseases.

**8. Who is your favorite public health figure and why?**

It is difficult to name only one, but I would mention Dr. Jonas Salk who developed the vaccine that eradicated polio.

**9. What is next for you after you complete your MPH degree?**

I will continue to work in research and I will get involved in public health policy making. In a five to seven-year plan, I will pursue my doctorate for public health.