

features

AU health center fights against COVID-19



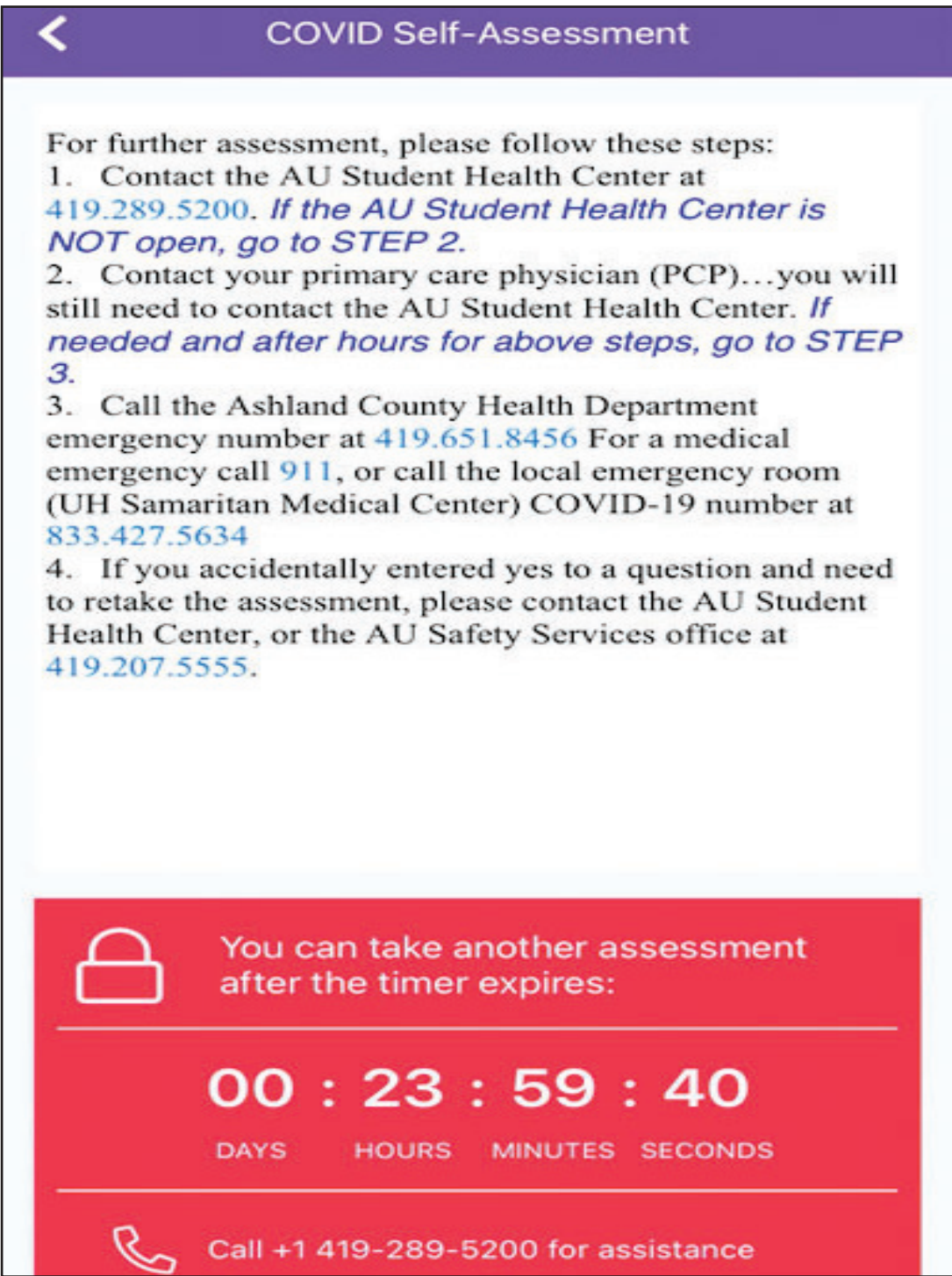
STRONGER TOGETHER. SAFER TOGETHER. CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE

Ashland University's motto for the fall semester: Stronger Together. Safer Together.

BELLA PACINELLI
Features Editor

It is obvious that coronavirus has created a whole new world on Ashland University's campus. There is not one student, faculty or staff member who has not had to adjust to the new guidelines and protocols set in place due to COVID-19. However, no one is affected by these changes quite like the AU health center. With an overwhelming number of students reaching out with questions and phone calls regarding COVID-19 test results, nurse practitioner Sarah Taylor has found this semester to be very challenging. "It's difficult when you've got a ton of calls coming in," she said. "The hurdle is probably the lack of staffing and resourcing to really manage the volume." Although it has been hard to keep up with the demands of COVID-19, the health center spent a lot of time preparing for the fall semester. "We worked a good bit in the spring and summer with lots of meetings, looking up guidelines, talking to the health department and communicating with the local hospital," Taylor said. One of the biggest concerns the nurses of the health center had was not knowing whether it would be truly safe to bring students back to campus this semester. "Bringing the number of students back to a small area was the greatest worry," she said. "That truly wasn't the decision of the health center, obviously that was way above us." Taylor is surprised at the amount of COVID-19 cases so far, admitting that it has been less than expected. "That being said, I don't know that we know the whole true picture of campus," she said. "We just know what is reported to us." While AU affiliates are required to receive their green badge from the Campus Shield app each day,

this data is not reported to the health center. "We can look and see if there are red badges or not, but nobody knows who has what," she said. "It's supposed to really be a method of people self-monitoring and then if a student gets that red badge, they're supposed to contact the health center." If a student is suspected of being positive for COVID-19, the health center schedules a virtual appointment with them to go over symptoms and possible exposure. "Most often, we do recommend they get tested and have them isolate immediately," Taylor said. "Then they are ordered a test if they are going to stay local." Tests can be administered across the street from Samaritan Hospital in Ashland or through Ohio Health in Mansfield. Once the test results are given to the health center, they will contact the student and take appropriate action depending on the result. "If the test is negative and they haven't had a fever within 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication, typically they can return to normal campus life," Taylor said. "If they're positive or if they're still having symptoms then obviously that's a different story." Taylor feels confident in the work they do at the health center to fight against COVID-19. "I think we do well," she said. "I also think we could use like 10 more of us because we're really stretched." There is a lot of back and forth that takes place through the health center with every possible COVID-19 case. "With each situation, you have to evaluate the person, get the test set up — there's another two to three phone calls — then we have to notify several people on campus and the health department," she said. "It's just a lot of coordination that takes up so much time." The emotional toll of COVID-



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Students are instructed to contact the health center if they get a red badge on the Campus Shield app.

ID-19 has been more impactful than the physical toll on students from what Taylor has seen. "Their daily lives are disrupted by having to be isolated or quarantined which I completely understand," she said. "Students are frustrated with the major inconvenience of this pandemic." Nevertheless, the health center staff feels appreciated by the students they have had to work

closely with this semester. One of these students, sophomore exercise science major Anna Sanders, found the health center to be very helpful during her COVID-19 situation. "Just the reassurance of them doing their jobs and getting me back on campus as fast as they can was helpful," she said. "I know they have to deal with a lot of different students, but it was very individualized and they did truly seem like they cared about me."

Although Sanders' symptoms ended up being from a common cold, she quarantined at home the normal amount of time until she recovered. "They didn't want me coming back right away because I still had symptoms and they were worried that maybe the date that I got tested I didn't actually have COVID-19," she said. "They also didn't want me passing the cold onto anyone else." From the moment Sanders started feeling symptoms to being fully recovered from her cold, she felt comfortable reaching out to the health center. "I actually called them a few times," she said. "The two nurses I was working with gave me their personal cell phone numbers so I could call them over the weekend since no one would be in the office." It was helpful for Sanders to talk through her symptoms with the health center, making the situation feel less daunting.

"I was confident knowing what my body was handling as far as my symptoms," she said. "They were always very kind about it." While it took a few days for Sanders to get her negative test results back, there was a lot of communication afterward. "I called the urgent care I went to multiple times for the test results and then trying to get those faxed or emailed over to the health center was important," she said. "So I called them a lot to make sure they actually had all of my paperwork figured out." Throughout this process, it was clear to Sanders that the nurses at the health center were feeling the pressure. "They were super stressed out, but you kind of had to be understanding at that point because of everyone thinking that maybe they did have COVID-19," she said. "Their jobs are hard because they're dealing with so many people." The health center has faced problems with students not answering calls from the health department and not being honest about who they have been in contact with. Taylor needs all students to understand the importance of giving the information needed to reduce the spread of COVID-19. "I want students to know that COVID-19 really does exist and it's not just a disease that affects older people," she said. "It's very easily spread so just social distance and wear a mask."



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The health center is only taking appointments this semester; walk-ins are not permitted.