

## **OSF St Joseph Medical Center Gets Unexpected Christmas Gift of Early Vaccines**

OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center critical care advanced practice nurse in Bloomington, Illinois Friday afternoon.

Kristin Wilkins, APRN, APN Pulmonology, works with COVID-19 patients who often need to be put on respirators. Wilkins says she felt so much relief - and hope - when she heard she was going to get vaccinated much earlier than anticipated.

She said, "We've been going through quite a bit these last nine months and I think there's a light at the end of the tunnel. I'm hopeful for the community, for my co-workers, my peers that this is the answer we've been looking for."

OSF St. Joseph Medical Center President Lynn Fulton credits Sandy Salverson, vice president of pharmacy operations for OSF HealthCare, with moving quickly for state approval to transfer the vaccine after learning Knox County had extra doses.

She explained Pfizer sent an extra dose within vials, plus there were additional doses after all 1A tier health care and support personnel received their first shots in the western Illinois region this week. Initially, McLean County did not expect to receive vaccine for a couple weeks because it did not meet the state's deaths-per-capita criteria used to distribute the initial supply.

Fulton says it was an unexpected Christmas miracle for thrilled frontline Mission Partners (employees).

"Oh they were so excited. Some of them were even emotional to get the opportunity to get this vaccine. They really viewed it as a gift to be one of the first to receive it," she said.

For those who work with patients who require intensive monitoring and care, and who can remain in the Intensive Care Unit for weeks, it can be devastating to witness the loss. One woman who lost a husband and father recently returned to thank caregivers. Fulton says that happens often.

"Those stories are so heartfelt but you think about what that does as people see others suffering from this and so to think that there's a vaccine coming – and it's going to be a while before everyone can get it – but to know that it's one the way really does give that piece of hope."

Wilkins says she was hit with a wave of relief when she heard she was going to get vaccinated much earlier than anticipated.

She said, "We've been going through quite a bit these last nine months and I think there's a light at the end of the tunnel. I'm hopeful for the community, for my co-workers, my peers that this is the answer we've been looking for."

Critical Care Nurse Savannah Crull says people don't realize that it is so stressful having to put on so much personal protective equipment – which delays rushing in to help a patient who is taking a quick downward turn. Patients also have multiple issues which complicates care.

"Their lungs are failing, their kidneys are failing, they're bleeding and clotting at the same time so there's a lot going on with them and we have to be a lot more involved in their care which makes it very difficult to stay on top of them – as a person."

Crull will be posting on social media about getting the vaccine to push others to do so when it's available.

"We need a 70% vaccination rate for this to work; for this to actually do anything so think about your neighbors, your family, your postal worker who is out there every day being exposed. We need this to end," she declared.

Respiratory therapist Jeff Kayfish has a wife and a child at home and he has feared for their health. He was excited to get his shot and had no concerns about the safety of the vaccine, despite it being developed in record time.

He said, "I trust the process. I've been vaccinated against a lot of things after being in the military so this was just another vaccine you gotta get."

Another assurance the vaccine would be safe came in the form of a blessing by OSF St Joseph Medical Center Manager of Pastoral Services, Gayle Cyrilik who said a specially written COVID blessing and then he sprinkled holy water as a final gesture.