

The Monumental Task of Running a COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic

Shelli Dankoff – Media Relations Supervisor

Lisabeth Pongracz has been helping to manage one of the COVID-19 vaccination clinics operated by OSF HealthCare across its 14 locations throughout Illinois and the UP of Michigan.

The days may be long, but the appreciation is immeasurable.

“I’ve never been thanked so many times in such a short period of time by patients. We are thanked by patients every day, but it’s every patient that comes in here and you can see by their body language, by their smiles, by their eyes, this is their ticket to enjoy their lives again.”

That “ticket” is the COVID-19 vaccine, which requires 2 doses, spaced weeks apart, to be considered fully effective. Public vaccinations first became available in mid-January.

But for health care organizations like OSF HealthCare, the planning to administer those vaccines, and to efficiently operate a vaccination clinic, began months ago.

“What’s unique about both of these drugs is they’re extremely different in their reconstitution, their ability to remain outside of storage, cold chain storage. So our nurses need to be competenced and trained on what that looks like. The ability for them to stay in a room temperature is extremely timed, so I know within our clinics we’ve set timers and processes and assured that there’s stability in that drug. So that’s critically important so that we can make sure it gets into that patient’s arm. Moderna, likewise, different reconstitution process, different way to pull that drug up, and both of them have different education points for our patients,” explains Sarah Overton, Chief Nursing Officer, OSF Multi-Specialty Services.

“I think it’s critical for us to be ready and willing to support our local health departments. I think we have it down to a fine science and a process so we really are ready to take an allocation in any market where we can receive it. We would love to be running these clinics and just get everybody done so we can move out of this pandemic.”

Says Pongracz: “We’re affecting change because those patients can go back to their lives again and they can do what they want to do and they can be where they want to be with their families again. And they don’t have the fear of COVID hanging over them and the fear of becoming sick or making someone in their family sick by being an asymptomatic patient.”

Since the clinics began, OSF HealthCare has vaccinated more than 51-hundred patients, averaging 500 patients or more a day in some locations. Overton is overseeing the coordination of the clinics, and knows they have to be a well-oiled machine to work well for patients and staff.

She knows people are anxiously awaiting their opportunity to be vaccinated, and understands any frustrations. But the allotment of vaccine given to OSF HealthCare or other providers is out of their control since they come from the local county health department, a relationship Overton says is vitally important to making widespread vaccinations work.

“We receive state allocations down to the local county levels and then every county health department gets to decide how they’re going to effectively use that vaccine for their population. Perhaps it’s the essential worker that they want to target such as teachers, grocery workers, public transit or our 65+ population,” says Overton.

“We get our allocations usually Monday and by Saturday our goal is to have it all administered. We’ve definitely hit that mark and we are administering and depleting our reserves to make sure that we have utilized that vaccine. We can’t leave a dose sitting in a syringe in a refrigerator, it doesn’t have that stability. It’s critical to have that just-in-time approach to call people and let them know it’s time to come in, we need you.”

For Lisabeth Pongracz, just knowing they are finally able to do something proactive on the front lines to help stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus makes all the difference. Every day, there are patient stories that remind her of that.

“She had an emotion about her and so I asked her ‘are you going to be okay, are you anxious about this?’ And she said no, she said ‘I haven’t seen this many people, I haven’t been around this many people in a year. I haven’t been able to see my family, to hold my family.’ She said ‘this is my hope for a future to be able to do that again.’ And that, the long hours, the planning, everything that we put into this, that’s what we’re here for.”

Learn more about the vaccination efforts by OSF HealthCare [here](#).