Pharmacy Team Leads Efforts for COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic for Underserved

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Abstract
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Pharmacy Team Leads Efforts for COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic for Underserved

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Completing Advanced Practice Placement Experience (APPE) rotations in the midst of a pandemic such as COVID-19 left many pharmacy students across the state and country with frequent changes and cancellations to their schedules. As stressful and anxiety-producing as that can be, it also creates some unique opportunities. During one of my last rotations, I had the opportunity to participate in a Service-Learning Elective at St. Joseph’s Neighborhood Center in Rochester, N.Y., where we were able to design and execute the Center’s first COVID-19 vaccine clinic.

St. Joseph’s Neighborhood Center (SJNC), founded in 1993, provides comprehensive medical and mental health services to the uninsured and under-insured population in and around the Rochester area. The Center is committed to raising the health status and quality of life of individuals and families by providing free/low-cost services to the underserved community. The Center serves approximately 1,500 patients a year and continues to grow and develop with the needs of the community. One of the most recent developments was their desire to become a COVID-19 vaccination site, allowing the Center to provide education and vaccines to their patients and the surrounding community.

The pharmacy team worked closely with the medical and administrative staff throughout the process, having a vital role at each stage. The Center was able to secure 50 doses of the vaccine for a pop-up clinic scheduled for the following Saturday, a day the Center was typically closed. Working with other SJNC staff, we were able to complete the required applications, educational training sessions and administrative processes. Applying to become a COVID vaccine site included documenting our clinic type, population served, and ensuring vaccine storage capabilities. We were fortunate to receive a pharmaceutical grade refrigerator for vaccine storage through a generous donation from a local hospital, allowing us to continuously monitor conditions and meet the CDC requirements. Training and education was provided by the NYS immunization reporting
system (NYSIIS). We planned the clinic logistics, including how the clinic would run, unidirectional patient flow, timing of appointments and the supplies needed for the day (PPE, sharps containers, alcohol wipes, gloves, bandages, etc). The staff relied on the pharmacy team for information on vaccine storage conditions, patient education, eligibility, and reporting, including the required paperwork and applications for the state.

The day before the clinic we were able to transport the vaccine from the Monroe County Health Department back to SJNC. We received the vaccine doses in five thawed 10-dose vials in addition to syringes, vaccine cards and information sheets. Transport involved continuous monitoring of the vaccine temperature to ensure it did not deviate from the recommended range of 2–8 degrees C. Excessive care needed to be taken during transport so as to not disturb/shake the vaccine too much. Additional paperwork was required upon arrival at the clinic which included temperatures reached during transport and vaccine received with manufacturer and lot number.

The clinic day was a great illustration of the impact pharmacists and pharmacy students can have on a vaccine clinic. With appointments ranging every 15 minutes from 9 AM to 2PM, students and pharmacists from the Wegmans School of Pharmacy (WSoP) were able to administer all 50 doses of the vaccine to the patients. In addition, six other volunteer staff and students from WSoP assisted the vaccinators to ensure patients paperwork was completed properly and handled the draw up and preparation of the vaccine doses. Several SJNC staff volunteered to help patients register, do additional paperwork (attestation), and schedule their second dose during the 15 minutes monitoring time.

The 50 vaccine doses were provided primarily to the Center’s patient population, which represented a range of minority groups, the elderly, and those with chronic conditions. Several patients noted that they would only receive the vaccine if they could get it at the Center, due to the trust and relationship the Center had with its patients. With several patients not arriving for their scheduled appointment, we were left with a few extra doses toward the end of the clinic. We recruited several restaurant workers from a local restaurant across the street and were able to vaccinate two student volunteers who had not yet received the vaccine, ensuring that every dose had been utilized by the end of the day.

Post clinic tasks included vaccination reporting to NYS through the NYS Immunizations Information System (NYSIIS). Within NYSIIS we were able to create profiles for our patients,
log vaccine inventory, and report vaccines administered with information such as route, location, and vaccinator.

Having pharmacists and pharmacy students be so heavily involved in the COVID vaccine clinic is a great example of how pharmacists can play critical roles in the healthcare system. Possessing the knowledge and skills needed, pharmacists can have a large impact on patients from all communities. It was a great privilege to be able to serve at this vaccine clinic, being involved in every step of the process: planning the clinic, transporting, handling and storing the vaccine, administering the doses to patients, and completing the necessary documentation associated with patient care. The Center’s healthcare team utilized the pharmacists and students to their capacity, demonstrating the trust and confidence they had in the pharmacy team. As a student, the experiences I had aiding and participating in a pop-up vaccine clinic are ones I will carry with me throughout my career.


About the Authors:

Kyle McMillan is a Pharm.D. Candidate, at the Wegmans School of Pharmacy, St. John Fisher College. Dr. Christine Birnie, Dean and Professor of the school, served as his preceptor for the Service Learning APPE rotation at St. Joseph’s Neighborhood Center.