



## **Dr. Tam: Beebe Has a Vaccine Mandate, Not an Ultimatum**

*By David A. Tam, MD, MBA, CPHE, FACHE, President & CEO, Beebe Healthcare*

Sussex County is a special place. It's why we choose to live here. It's a wonderful county full of nature – rural and coastal – and unique, thanks to the diverse thoughts, opinions, and people who make up our community.

It is not like New Castle or Kent Counties. It is Sussex County, and it is our home.

I've lived here long enough to know that Beebe has been specializing in serving the unique healthcare needs of Sussex County for over 105 years and decisions reflecting that difference often guides our policies and procedures.

Close communities share opinions, communicate concerns, and watch out for one another. As President & CEO of your local nonprofit independent community health system, I have received and responded to a multitude of messages regarding COVID-19 vaccinations for our staff. They have been both critical and complimentary, but I value each one because this dialogue is so critical to how I believe a community health system must operate – communicating facts, sharing opinions, and watching out for one another.

So, let me be very clear – Beebe does have a vaccine mandate. It's the same mandate employed by most other health systems in Delaware and across the nation, and it aligns with the Governor's mandate. Starting Oct. 1, Beebe mandated that all team members receive the COVID vaccine or submit to weekly testing and reporting on their own time and at their own expense.

Beebe considered all options to make the best determination for the safety and care of our patients. Instead of giving our team members an ultimatum, we chose to give them an incentive with the understanding this policy would change with the Sept. 30 deadline. But the mandate started October 1.

This is not new news. In a Aug. 20, 2021 Facebook post, we stated that Beebe Healthcare would be following the governor's policy and that we were working on the particulars of the testing requirement with the State. It was also mentioned in my closing of the Sept. 22, 2021, virtual town hall. Perhaps, in hindsight, I should have been more clear. But I'll live one of Beebe's Value: Always Learning, Always Growing.

Beebe has been guided by our belief in the science of the vaccine and the data that supports its safety and efficacy. Our team has demonstrated its belief with a high vaccination rate. The percentage is higher than the percentage of those 18 and older who are vaccinated in Delaware. Like every other health system, Beebe must accommodate certain valid exemptions to getting vaccinated. Starting soon, Beebe is also mandating the COVID vaccine for all new employees.

Some of our caregivers have made a personal healthcare choice to not obtain the COVID vaccine – we continue to work with them daily to provide the latest information. In my opinion, they agree with the science, but they are making their own decision about their health. And they will submit to mandatory testing AND continued strict adherence to masking and the use of other PPE.

As the President & CEO of Beebe, I have made the decision to not lay down a termination ultimatum at this time. Beebe believes in the vaccine. And Beebe also believes in our team of caring, compassionate caregivers who have already sacrificed so much to care for our unique community. At a time when healthcare workers are so stressed and exhausted that they are ready to leave a profession they love, I believe we need to raise them up as much as possible, while doing all we can to ensure the safety of our patients and their families – caring for them through COVID-19, strokes, heart attacks, accidents, flu, and everything a community health system faces daily during busy summers or quiet winters.

For those who have reached out with your concerns – I hope this clarifies some things. Thank you for your support and your concern. I have responded to many on social media because I came to Beebe with the goal of being a responsive leader of a responsive community health system.

Please know that Beebe's policies and procedures will continue to be in alignment with government health authorities throughout this pandemic crisis.

It is also critical to remember that before there was a vaccine available to healthcare workers and the public, healthcare facilities were safe places to receive care. And they still are. Months of data show effective infection prevention measures keep patients and caretakers safe.

Beebe's standards of infection control have not changed, nor has the commitment from our team members. That is a promise. I have walked the walls alongside these

healthcare heroes for the last 19 months. Their dedication and commitment to patient care remains unmatched.

All team members continue to wear proper PPE (gowns, N-95s, gloves, goggles) where appropriate, practice hand hygiene and adhere to many other safety protocols that kept patients and visitors safe pre-vaccine. Beebe's commitment to providing safe, quality care has been a part of Beebe's pledge to Sussex County for 105 years. It is something that every team member prides themselves on here at Beebe.

Thank you for listening. Thank you for making Sussex County special. I know our conversation will continue. It needs to in order to end this deadly pandemic because we are all in this together.

David