



## *Perspective/Opinion*

# **COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic Reflections from MCW's Research and Clinical Nurses**

Compiled by Hope Campbell, MSN, RN

Happy Nurses Week to all the MCW nurses and nurse practitioners!

When I started working remotely in March 2020, I felt helpless and guilty that I was in the position of being able to work from home while my nurse friends were working on the front lines in emergency departments and ICUs. I felt like I should be out there alongside other nurses caring for the very sick. My position as a research nurse made me feel like an imposter.

When the opportunity arose to administer vaccines at the newly created MCW COVID-19 vaccine clinic, I knew that I wanted to be part of the effort. After the MCW pharmacy students, who were "first-in" vaccinators, had to return to their classes, our group of MCW nurses and nurse practitioners volunteered on a regular basis to work alongside the pharmacists, pharmacy students, medical students, physicians, and medical assistants to staff the clinic.

I've worked on this campus for almost twenty years but have only been employed at MCW for three. Meeting people and being able to volunteer was incredible. All of us had other duties within our departments, but still made the time to volunteer because it felt great to be a part of something so meaningful.

During the vaccination clinic, I met coworkers face-to-face that I had previously met only via email. I had emotional conversations with community members coming in for vaccines that had not spoken to another person out of their "bubble" in eight months. After a year of being apart, families would now be planning get-togethers, thanks to the MCW vaccine clinic. I even had the opportunity to vaccinate my parents and my sister. I listened to stories of family members that had died of COVID-19 and how thankful the person sitting in front of me was that they could get the vaccine. I'm thankful for these short but powerful conversations that were had. They will stick with me for a long time.

The beautiful thing about being a nurse is we can serve and provide care in so many ways. That doesn't make us any less of a nurse if we aren't a front-line worker. I'm so proud to have been involved in the clinic even if it was a small role.

Here are the thoughts from some of the MCW nurses that volunteered in the clinic:

**Barbara Shimada-Krouwer, RN, BSN**

I've been an RN for over thirty-six years. I felt that being a nurse was my "calling" since I was five years old. I've specialized in neuro, cardiovascular, and clinical research.

During my career, I've cared for hundreds of patients, from post-op spinal fusion and stroke patients to CABG and post-cardiac catheterization patients. I have been part of countless research studies that were designed to provide new advances in pharmaceuticals, treatments, and devices to treat a myriad of diseases. I have even treated COVID-19 positive patients involved in clinical trials.

The thanks and tears of gratitude that I have received from those that I have vaccinated will forever be part of me. People were grateful for many things:

*Vaccinated to see their first grandchild. Vaccinated to be able to hold their elderly parent in a nursing home. Vaccinated to be able to go back to work. Vaccinated to save their life.*

Because of the sheer gravity of this pandemic, I feel that I have been able to contribute at least a small part in getting this infection under control. The vaccination team coordinators were truly amazing. It was inspiring to work alongside so many dedicated professionals that shared the same goal of getting people vaccinated!

Being able to be part of the COVID-19 vaccine clinic has been the most important nursing role that I have ever performed. The countless lives saved, and illness prevented is why I am a nurse.

**Karen Schmidt, RN, CCRC**

As a nurse who has been out of acute care and unable to help in the direct care of COVID-19 patients, this was a great opportunity for me to utilize my nursing skills to help be part of the solution to this pandemic.

It was a joy to help out in the vaccine clinic! I loved meeting all the very appreciative vaccine recipients and volunteers from all over campus. I really appreciated how well the clinic was run, and the focus on teaching whether it was educating recipients on the

vaccine or watching the pharmacy and medical students learn how to give their first IM injections.

### **Roxanne Pritchard, RN, BSN**

I was honored and excited to be able to volunteer in the vaccine clinic and appreciated the support I received from my department which allowed me to volunteer in the clinic during normal work hours.

I looked forward to meeting those who were being vaccinated – to hear their stories, discuss their concerns, address their questions, and ensure their safety and well-being. These experiences reminded me why I became a nurse.

I was in awe of the number of faculty and staff who volunteered their time in the clinic and was proud to be a part of a very organized process involving multiple departments within MCW.

### **Sonya Carpenter, RN**

While my role was primarily administering the vaccine, I was impressed to see what it took to run a clinic comprised of volunteers to take on this huge task. Everyone involved, from front door screeners to the staff preparing the vaccine and monitoring the vaccine expiration time (*six hours from drawing up to in a person's arm*) to those cleaning the workstations after every participant to the vaccinators, to the volunteers monitoring the patients for 15-30 mins afterwards for risk of anaphylaxis were wonderful. I was very honored to be part of a team that included volunteers of all areas MDs, pharmacists, nurses, medical assistants and administrative staff. This vaccination clinic has vaccinated over 10, 000 people.

To prepare, I read up on patient education for the participants (*what to expect after receiving vaccine*). Still, I was surprised by the number of questions people asked. Many people had gotten their information on social media and from news outlets. Unfortunately, a lot of what they had learned was not from reputable sources, so my advice was often to check with their healthcare providers, the CDC, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, and other reputable sources.

I consider myself very fortunate that, as a front line worker, I was in one of the first groups to receive the vaccine. The people to whom I administered the vaccines were primarily over sixty-five, educators, childcare workers, police, fire, and correctional staff. Many of them were so grateful and humbled to be able to receive this vaccine. It was rewarding to be part of that.

### **Sherin Uthuppan, RN**

It was such an honor to be able to participate and to have played a part in bringing us closer to the end of this pandemic. I thought it was inspiring how nurses from all different fields heard the call for help and were able to come together quickly to save so many lives. Some were new grads. Some were non-clinical. Heck, I'm sure there were nurses who came out of retirement! While working at the clinic, I met a lawyer whose first career was as an RN. He was so happy to finally have a chance to use his hands-on nursing skills for the first time in forever. I thought that was really cool!

### **Jesus Chavez-Penaloza, LPN**

I enjoyed assisting and getting to know different people from different departments. I was inspired also by the new administration, to be a patriot and assist teachers, police, and other groups able to come in. Even the non-clinical volunteers, such as the people who helped to clean and those who double-checked the forms were great. I'm a team player and felt the need to assist and keep our associates safe and informed. I wanted to absorb the information to share with my family.

We encountered challenges, such as when some people did not have access to email to receive a reminder to come in for the next appointment. I really liked how Dr. Karen MacKinnon adjusted the flow to best serve the community. All in all, it took true team effort to make the clinic a success.

### **Lindsay Ruiz, RN**

I thought the atmosphere was overall very positive. It was amazing to be able to see people from all over come together for this one initiative. It was inspiring to hear people's stories of hope and their motivation for getting the vaccine. Despite having some issues with staffing shortages, the volunteers seemed to have great teamwork attitudes and were motivated to get as many people the vaccine as possible.

### **Renee Dex, RN, BSN**

For me... it was so nice to be a "nurse" again as most of my days spent doing administration tasks. It was important for all of us to be a part of "something bigger" especially since we had been working so hard on COVID-19 clinical studies where we were involved with data collection, treatment protocols, and medication administration since we had returned to on-campus work in May 2020.

I loved that we were able to meet so many people at MCW and in the community that we would not normally encounter and educate them about the vaccine and its importance. People were so grateful.