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Squared Up & Taking Shots

Our Stories from Vaccination Lines

Contributions from the 4sight Team
March 18, 2021

What do the United Center, a church gymnasium and a community pool have in common? Some folks on the 4sight Health team have had an early look at the vaccine landscape from the ground floor. Here are three of our vaccine stories.



WELCOME TO PROTECTION

By Allen Weiss

Vax Day: Saturday January 30, 2021

Location: Florida

My wife and I qualified for the over 65 age group. We registered as soon as we could with the City of Tampa, Hillsborough County, and with a local healthcare system. The City of Tampa folks called us first. Yes, they called us.

The City of Tampa searched all the databases it had to find residents 65 and up. They told us our names and birthdays were on a list of people who had applied to use the city's public pool system. We made a Saturday morning appointment.

We went to a 100-year-old African-American church in a neighborhood we hadn't visited before. We saw the ambulance in the parking lot, and joined a group of very friendly and welcoming, black and brown, over-65-year-old folks in the social hall.

We checked in, and paramedics administered the shots. Staffers completed paperwork, and we waited the mandatory 15-minute observation period. We were on our way after a comforting experience.

Three weeks later, we reconnected with the welcoming team at the church.

We didn't experience any reaction of significance, and we have not changed our habits. We still wear masks, avoid crowds, and will wait on dining indoors at restaurants or going to theaters.

The experience brought us closer to others in our community as we all recognize we have much more in common than we are different. Just joining a public swimming pool years before help break down some long-antiquated unspoken barriers. That led not only to a great place to swim, but also an early vaccination invitation. My advice: Get vaccinated.



Dr. Allen Weiss is a 4sight Health Contributor, Chief Medical Officer for the national Blue Zones Project, and former CEO of the NCH Healthcare System in Naples, Florida.

A DAY AT THE VACCINATION SITE

By Kerry Weems

Vax Day: Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Location: Arizona

I got my first dose of the Moderna vaccine — there's some joy in that statement. However, it wasn't easy.

I'm not in a risk group, but in many states there's an ethical way of getting vaccinated without jumping the line — volunteering at a mass vaccination site.

I spent the day in an Arizona church gymnasium. An engine of volunteers powered the process, with management by 8-10 paid staff from FEMA and local health systems.

That engine vaccinated just over 800 people in about seven hours, and does that each day. According to the FEMA lead at the site, if they had sufficient vaccine, they could administer up to 1,500 people a day. He also told me that it was his 48th straight day of work.

I was paired with another volunteer, a physician who gave the injections. He also performed additional screening to very-high risk individuals, including those on chemotherapy, with significant chronic diseases, a history of anaphylactic reactions. My job was running the computer for authentication and batch control purposes; he focused on the patients. Or as I told people who asked me for health advice: "He's the doc; I'm just the clerk."

The check-in and vaccine record was a local health system's EHR, and I actually entered data into it. A number of folks coming through had full records in the system. Others, like me, just had the vaccine registration data in the record.

The vaccinations were reserved for people 65 and up, and there were four vaccination lanes—three for normal risk and one for high-risk individuals. I worked the high-risk lane. Here are a few purely anecdotal observations.

From a logistical and workflow standpoint, it was remarkable.

- People showed up at designated times, checked in, got screened, and got vaccinated in 10 minutes or less.
- Site managers told us that we would change vaccine batches sometime after noon. We ran out of vaccine briefly before the new batch arrived. Total downtime was about 15 minutes—just in time inventory almost at its finest.
- It was eight hours of heads-down work, so if you're thinking of volunteering be forewarned. This is not a celebrity or politician volunteer "photo-op" moment.

The people coming through my lane were prepared.



Photo courtesy of Kerry Weems

Larson Newspapers gave big coverage to the vaccine site where Kerry Weems worked and got vaccinated against COVID-19.

- Some needed a first dose, some a second.
- All were incredibly fluent with the vaccine, the types, and the side effects.
- Our site administered the Moderna vaccine, so there was almost universal dread of the side effects of the second dose.
- The doc I worked with did a great job setting realistic expectations.

Through the screening, I could see that some seniors faced almost complete failure of primary care. This is simply inexcusable.

- A shocking number of people who came through were under the treatment of a specialty care physician but seemed to be missing the fundamentals of primary care.
- One screening question asked about reactions to other vaccines. Several people, all over 65, answered that they hadn't had a vaccination in many years, some since they were children. No flu, shingles, pneumococcal, tetanus...
- Some were averse to vaccines.
- Others said vaccines weren't offered to them regularly, despite being under the care of a physician.

We vaccinated a large number of people who are desperately ill who live outside of an institutional environment. They are receiving care, and seem to be living well enough, but only a few years ago they would have been in a long-term care facility.

Most people getting vaccinated expressed relief. So many were looking forward to a return to "normal." They said they wanted to see family they haven't seen in a year, or in the case

of a few, grandchildren born in the last year, ever. However, I did see a bit of hostility from people whose caregiver or family had insisted on vaccination, along with a measure of indifference from others.

The volunteers were the last to be vaccinated for the day. Same as everyone else, each of us had to wait the 15-minute observation period after the shot.

I reflected on my role in helping build the pandemic preparedness plan in 2005 and 2006. Smart people thought it through; my job was to fit it into the crazy Federal budget structure. We envisioned and resourced rapid vaccine

development and mass vaccination sites. Fifteen years ago, we just hoped it would work as well as it is working.



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PERSONALLY STICKING IT TO COVID-19

By Dave Johnson

Vax Day: Wednesday, March 10, 2021

Location: Chicago, IL

Indiana Wants Me

My [March 2nd Dispatch](#) chronicled my Quixotic attempts to make a COVID-19 vaccine appointment in Illinois. It really did feel like an "impossible dream." The saga ended when I used Indiana's centralized reservation to schedule an appointment for St. Patrick's Day. Within ten minutes I had a vaccination appointment, confirmation and driving directions to the vaccine administration site. The Hoosier Daddy had come through, or so I thought.

I made the mistake of retelling my vaccination story on the WLS Bruce St. James morning show. Bruce and sidekick Judy loved the story. Judy even contacted me afterward to get the website address for Indiana vaccinations.

WLS is a Chicago radio powerhouse that clearly reaches into Indiana. A few days after the interview, I noticed that Indiana's vaccine website had posted stipulations that only Indiana residents could receive vaccines at Indiana vaccination sites. That wasn't the case when I registered. I'll never know whether my WLS interview triggered the new residency requirement.

Whoops. Who was my Vaccine Daddy now? I tried but wasn't able to verify whether my non-resident vaccine appointment was still valid. I was prepared to roll the dice, but fortune intervened.

United We Vaccinate

In early March, Illinois opened tens of thousands vaccination appointments at the United Center (UC). The UC is large arena where the Chicago Bulls and Blackhawks play, about 3 miles west of the Loop in downtown Chicago, and one of the Biden administration's mass vaccination sites.

The City of Chicago is using ZocDoc to schedule vaccine appointments throughout the City, which is pretty cool. I'd registered with ZocDoc in January. When the UC vaccination site opened, ZocDoc sent a link to their reservation page. There were hundreds of appointment times available. I picked 4:45 p.m. on March 10th. Within seconds, I had confirmation of my appointment and a tip sheet for navigating the process smoothly.

The Army's 101st Airborne Division is managing vaccination logistics at the UC. They've set up a series of ventilated tents in adjacent parking lots to register, direct and administer vaccination. The site can administer up to 6,000 vaccinations a day.

Individuals receiving vaccinations reflect the region's remarkable diversity. People of all backgrounds, professions and ethnicities come for COVID-19 vaccinations. They do it for themselves and the broader Chicagoland community. I know there's widespread reluctance to take vaccines. None was on display on the day I got my shot in the arm.

Uniformed soldiers are everywhere moving the process along. A separate staging area registers those without digital appointment confirmations. Transport assistance and interpreters are readily available. Staff performs all tasks with crisp efficiency and a smile.

Military Precision

I pulled into the designated parking lot at 4:40. Traffic coordinators immediately guided me to an available parking spot. It felt like parking at a Bulls game — separate entrance and exit lanes, cars kept moving, no wasted effort. Within minutes, I'd parked, masked up and walked the short distance to a registration line.

In rapid-fire fashion, I'd registered, had my temperature taken, answered repeated questions regarding my health, received a background information packet, and been directed to my vaccine station. I asked the soldier who registered me about the Army's new ponytail policy. She answered that it works for some, but she was sticking with a hair bun because it's more professional. Then she sent me to a vaccine station.

An Army medic named Glen administered my vaccine. He'd served two duty tours in Iraq and had a gentle touch. I thanked him for his service, waited the mandated 15 minutes and was on my way. The whole exercise took less than an hour.

The next day, I received an email with my second-shot appointment, three weeks to the minute back at the UC. Now I have to cancel my Indiana appointment!

The UC Vaccination Center's efficiency, professionalism and effectiveness were truly impressive. After all the illness, death and destruction the pandemic has caused, it was heartwarming to see so many Chicagoans sticking it to COVID-19 big time.

Maybe, just maybe, if America has the collective wherewithal to conquer COVID-19, we can use this success to tackle the nation's other major challenges. As President Biden frequently admonishes, "It's never ever a good bet to bet against the American people." On my first vaccination day in March 2021, I believed him.



David W. Johnson is CEO of 4sight Health, a former investment banker and Peace Corps volunteer, and a proud revolutionary fighting to fix the broken U.S. healthcare system. If you have a question, [reach out and ask.](#)