



**Kenny D. McMorris, CEO at Charles Drew Health Center ... Professionals in health care and community resources aiding in access to COVID-19 vaccinations.**

## **Health care experts pull back the curtain on what it takes to vaccinate a community**

**by Michelle Leach**

The administration of vaccine into an upper arm takes just a few moments, but considerable processes and partnerships have to align to make that seemingly straightforward act possible.

"No matter what happens on the vaccine front, we still need to have robust and stable pro-

cesses and testing," said Charles Drew Health Center CEO Kenny D. McMorris. "It's one of the toolboxes that we need to mitigate the spread."

As one of seven federally-qualified health centers in the state (and 1,400 across the country), CDHC was solid in public health staples like

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"Our health center has been at the forefront of addressing health disparities for nearly 40 years," McMorris said. "But we had to really adjust how we provide services. The well child, woman exams and dental cleanings and exams, all of that had a pause."

The organization consolidated service sites, worked with vendors to get personal protective equipment and pivoted to virtual visits.

In middle to late February 2020, the team knew there was "something a little different" about this virus, versus others they've dealt with; the organization's first positive test followed March 16 last year.

"Fast forward a couple of months, and the availability of testing supplies began to improve," he said.

CDHC overcame unique challenges presented by its diverse population; for instance, interpreters were hired to overcome language barriers.

"We mobilized them immediately to get to a harder-to-reach population," he said. "With the historical mistrust that people of color have for the health care delivery system, it was important to get information out in a timely fashion."

"What I've always known, in my work, it's more about the messenger and less about the message. Far too often, health care is not inclusive of the population in terms of meeting them where they are."

As of early this month, CDHC has reportedly provided 13,200-plus COVID-19 tests, which are now processed in a timelier fashion as the in-state lab testing infrastructure is now in place.

McMorris also noted that it has implemented curbside testing and rapid antigen testing.

"We are doing roughly 175 tests a week," he said. "At one point, we were doing 250 to 270 a day."

The center began administering the Moderna two-dose vaccine to its staff in December.

"Sixty-five percent of our workforce has received the initial dose, and about 53% are fully vaccinated," he said. "We have provided 4,871 initial and 2,158 second doses."

Historical vaccine hesitancy couples with the 80% of CDHC's population who has one or two diagnosable comorbidities, which has been associated with more severe COVID symptoms.

"Across the country, Black and brown folks were dying and being hospitalized at a higher rate," he said. "So, there were some concerns about the availability and timing of the vaccine to those particular populations."

McMorris said CDHC has the capacity to do about 1,200 vaccinations each week.

"We're right at an infection point," he said. "There is an uptake of vaccine and an uptake of cases, and with variants, we could be looking at another spike. So, it's going to be so important to maintain the mask-wearing and distancing."

McMorris further reinforced the importance of having a health care "home."

He cited New England Journal of Medicine findings, which note that around 30% of individuals have some type of lingering "long-haul" symptoms.

"It could be a challenge for overall health," he said. "You need to have a personal relationship with a health care provider. You can't just 'go get a vaccine.'"

Do Space is opening up access to COVID-19 vaccine among those members of the community who do not have the hardware or connectivity to register online.

"Do Space is a technology library that

offers free access to computers and internet access to everyone in the community," said Rebecca Stavick, CEO of Community Information Trust, which runs Do Space. "If members of our community need access to a computer in order to sign up for a vaccination, they're welcome to drop in to Do Space and use our equipment for free. Do Space supports the vaccination effort and is proud to offer technology services which help support the health of our community."

TotalWellness had done over 20 onsite clinics in two weeks for organizations ranging from Airlite Plastics to J. Skinner Bakery as of late March. And, last Wednesday, the corporate wellness company announced it was opening up curbside vaccinations at its headquarters.

"We have over 23 years of managing flu shot events, so we understand all the details that go into a successful vaccination event," said founder and President Alan Kohli. "We already had a strong infrastructure, which meant that we could pivot to COVID-19 shots relatively easily. Our clients also see us vaccination experts. So, we have been a valuable resource to them as they navigate the new COVID-19 vaccines."



Kohli

Kohli acknowledged a lot of vaccine skeptics exist.

"The U.S. vaccine safety system works to make sure that all vaccines are as safe as possible," he said. "Safety has been a top priority as federal agencies work with vaccine manufacturers to develop and authorize a COVID-19 vaccine."

All Food and Drug Administration authorized vaccines have been tested in large clinical trials.

"Data from the manufacturers show that the known and potential harms of becoming infected with the coronavirus outweigh the potential safety risks of the vaccines," Kohli said.

Earlier this week, Supervisor Leah Casanave confirmed that many of the concerns the Douglas County Health Department and its partner, Prime Therapeutics, have heard revolve around side effects.

"We make sure to inform all the patients that side effects may happen and that they only last 24 to 48 hours," she said. "We also let them know that many people don't experience any side effects or very mild ones."

Prime's Principal Clinical Development Pharmacist Melissa Graham had reached out to Douglas County as it was seeking volunteers to help draw up vaccines at clinics.

"I knew that Prime had a unique setup, where we have about 25 non-traditional pharmacists at our Omaha location, non-traditional meaning that we work mostly during the week, daytime hours," Graham said. "We knew we

had an opportunity to step out of our day-to-day work and help."

Casanave reached out within a day; partly, it was noted that the Pfizer vaccine has an extra step that pharmacists are uniquely qualified to assist with.

"Because a thorough background check is needed to allow volunteers to administer the vaccine, our group of Prime pharmacists were recruited to help draw up the syringes," Graham said. "This allows us to be able to be flexible and help where needed. We arrive a few hours before the clinic opens so we can get a good supply started."

Within four hours, with two to pharmacists, around 800 syringes can be drawn up.

"We are pretty selective when it comes to choosing folks who help us draw up the vaccine," Casanave said. "We keep our group small so that we have a controlled environment and know how much to draw up for specific clinics. As the clinic times near the end, our team begins to slow down on drawing up vaccine so that we are sure to never waste anything. They start to thaw and draw up one vial at a time so we can ensure we don't have extra."

Graham said she has seen three clinics that have given 3,000 to 4,500 vaccines in an eight-hour period.

"We have been able to help take the stress off retail pharmacists, nurses and others by volunteering," she said. "It has been a great way for the health care community to work together and vaccinate nearly one-third of our state-wide population thus far."

## Marketing agencies boost small businesses

by David Kubicek

Agencies use the same methods to promote small businesses as they use to promote large ones, but businesses of any size must know their target audience before implementing a public relations and marketing plan.

Small companies often have more of a niche audience, which is an important consideration for marketers, according to Gina Pappas, owner of Pappas Marketing Communications (formerly Albers Communications Group).

Any communication tool or type of media can be scaled to meet the needs of a small business. An agency may not need to do a national press release distribution, as it would for a large firm, but the media relations piece can be scaled down to local news media, so it more effectively reaches the small company's target audience.

"What I always dig into is, where and how does their target audience consume news?" Pappas said. "Do they read the newspaper and watch local TV news? Do they get their news by scrolling Twitter? Knowing your target audience, understanding their media consumption habits, and developing a strategy to reach them in that space is valuable for customizing a PR plan for any business of any size, but especially for small businesses."

"Any good PR or communications plan is going to start with planning and strategy exercises to solidify your business's identity. You have to know exactly who you are as a business before you can effectively tell others."

KidGov President Lyn Wineman said

that a firm's marketing goals should come directly from its business strategy.

"Your plan should be focused and include key metrics to achieve," she said. "Small businesses can have an advantage in that there are fewer decision-makers so



Pappas



Wineman

it can be easier to get crystal clear on your purpose and points of differentiation. The disadvantage comes in the area of budget. A lesser budget requires greater focus and creativity to achieve the desired outcome."

Digital marketing and social media are often great vehicles for a small business because they are very targeted, flexible and cost efficient.

"Regardless of the medium, you need to make sure that you have a strategy in place and that you are not just blindly throwing your money into advertising," Wineman said.

"It's easy to spend a little money here and a little money there, and it all adds up. Without a solid plan in place, you could be wasting those funds. At KidGov, we like to say that branding is not just for the big dogs. A business with a strong brand has the advantages of commanding a higher

price, warding off competitive threats, and setting the stage for a more positive internal culture."

Daake Principal Greg Daake said customer experience expectations transcend scale of the business and industry, but promoting a small company versus a large one may lean towards personalization, such as one-on-one interaction, family-feel, and specialization versus wide breadth of offering.

"Some mass marketing avenues are probably out of the question economical-ly, but you can lean on social media, digital and — most powerfully — develop a word-of-mouth program that incentivizes your best customers to share their stories of how you delighted them throughout their own network," Daake said. "Many, many people will drive across town for that world-class taco joint, so when considering how to talk about your small business, put it in terms of what makes you the world's greatest. Why are you most certainly worth driving across town for? And, can you share a few stories — ideally in a customer's own words — on how that is really true?"

"Every business of every size, to stay in business, has a magic wand — some sort of secret sauce that someone, somewhere needs or wants. Focus on that and hopefully it's as different as possible from the competition — or make it so."

Daake