

Minutes of the October 13, 2021, meeting of the Upstate COVID-19 Regional Community Assessment Review and Equity (CARE) Panel

The Upstate COVID-19 Regional Community Assessment Review and Equity (CARE) Panel met on Wednesday, October 13, 2021 at 11:00 am via Microsoft Teams.

The following were in attendance:

Sue Veer, Carolina Health Centers, Inc.
Kandi Fredere, SCDHEC
Trey Moore, Abbeville Area Medical Center
Tim Womack, Appalachian Area Agency on Aging
Sunnie Harmon, SC Retail Association
David Church, Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System

Sue Veer, CARE Panel Chairperson, called the meeting to order.

General Updates:

DHEC – Kandi Fredere:

- Downward trend on positive cases, significant decrease in numbers.
- Still not letting up on access to testing or the number of case investigations in the Upstate. Want to make it through the holidays, be ready and be prepared in case of increase.
- Testing is decreasing, still assuring for that access across the region.
- Have seen a significant decrease demand for vaccine. Not a big rush for the boosters.
- Still making sure we have access, still providing clinics where needed for testing/vaccinating and doing case investigations.

Abbeville Area Medical Center – Dr. Trey Moore:

- We are still testing and giving out a lot of vaccines.
- Combined drive thru testing and vaccines, 2 days/week, 5 hours each time. Averaging 50-60 test/time; giving out 60ish vaccines/event. A lot of those are booster doses.
- Booster doses are a big command in our community. Giving out around 200-300 vaccines/week. Pretty good for our little clinic.
- Encouraged with progress.

SC Retail Association – Sunnie Harmon:

- Representing the SC Retail Association until new director is named.
- Biggest message to share with the SC Retail group is with needs. We are willing to mobilize our teams and if there are ways to communicate that business segment, let us know.

Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System – David Church:

- We hit an all-time high of COVID patients 299-300; during the winter had 253. Had the title of highest per capita/bed of COVID patients in the country. We have been trending down. Have 125 COVID patients today. Headed in the right direction.
- At the beginning of that trend had low vaccinated patients 97-98%; as progressed there is an increase in breakthrough cases. Of 125 - 14% are vaccinated; average age is 70-71. Unvaccinated ages are low 50s. What's hidden in numbers is the long-haul patients. After 20 days they go to another category, COVID but not contagious. Right now, we have about 40-45 of those patients. Taking up ICU beds and about half are on vents. Shout out to Jamie Farmer, DHEC – got 20 vents to get through rough spot.
- We had shut down non-elective procedures, bringing back this week.
- As of today – doing better.
- Vaccines – had boost for boosters, employees taking them, but not like it should be.

General Discussion:

- Would be nice to see direction from state level about what is the expectation, long term plans. This is a different level of healthcare that we were not expecting. Abbeville has had people at their facility due to lack of another facility open to go. Entering phase that acute phase is over, but we are hoping there will be a more organized resource on what to do with these patients. Would be interesting if the state, DHEC, analysis the latest COVID surge data. If we can figure out how to get data out to show impact of the unvaccinated, encourage people to take appropriate cautions
- Upstate hospitals check in weekly, and we see patients are holding up beds. Struggling for staffing. What is healthcare going to look like in a couple of years? Hospitals, Public Health has become the enemy. A lot of aggression.
- People and frontline healthcare workers are weary.

Vaccine Mandates:

- Abbeville Area Medical – during peak, rates for travel nurses increased. To staff the beds we have, we had to alter conditions of hiring just to get staff in the door to take care of patients. Implemented weekly testing on employees; did increase vaccination rate during last surge 80%. Latest surge wrecked plan we had for people to do the right thing. The unvaccinated nurses that came in to help us, have to give them some type of praise. They remained and put themselves in a situation that is knowingly dangerous to provide patient care.
- SRHS – no mandate in place for vaccine. Started out with education about vaccine and put an incentive with that. On October 1st included another incentive around vaccines, drawings for large prizes. Eligible if employee had already had the vaccine and for those who get the vaccine before drawing. Education, incentivize, still in process of doing it. Getting 5-7/day for first dose; 100/day for booster. Will follow what federal guidelines are. Spartanburg county is number one in state for children's religious exemptions.
- Toolkit did at Carolina Health Centers. If anyone needs anything, let Sue know.

Appalachian Arta Agency on Aging – Tim Womack

- All centers are doing senior vaccine clinics. Doing in Cherokee, Greenville, and Pickens counties. Will end at the end of this week. Will share numbers at next meeting.

Flu Vaccines:

- What are you seeing on flu vaccine? Some push back from staff. Policy is if you don't take flu vaccine, you have to take wear mask. Do we have enough flu vaccine clinics?
- Abbeville - same people that wanted COVID vaccine, wants flu vaccine. Starting next week, we are adding flu vaccines as well. Have a one stop shop. What we have seen, those that are on the fence about flu vaccine previously, are saying they don't want any vaccine. Outreach and encourage flu vaccine from state level is important. Grateful that last flu season was non-existent. Flu vaccine will be a challenge. All vaccines will be an issue moving forward.
- DHEC – at state level have been messaging flu vaccine and we have material if you want to use them. At local level, as we do outreach and education for COVID we are tacking flu on. Just got flu vaccine a couple of days ago but we are planning to do dual flu/COVID clinics as well. Have relationships with local school districts. Have had more schools sign agreement for school located vaccination clinics (SLVC) in the schools.

Follow-up Meeting:

- Regroup in a month, week after Thanksgiving. In meantime, will reach out to additional those that were suggested to join the group.

Discussion of Health Equity Learning Collaboration:

- The demands, where we are with COVID, not ready to make that transition.

Tasks:

- Minutes will be sent out and posted on the SCDHEC website.
- Angie will schedule next meeting for the week following Thanksgiving.

Meeting adjourned.

Next Scheduled Meeting
November 30, 2021
9:00am