

## Strategies to Improve Vaccination Rates in Nursing Home Staff:



Vaccines for COVID-19 have been approved and available in the United States since the FDA approval for Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Since this date, vaccination efforts have continued and been aimed at ensuring that the highest risk individuals have access to vaccines to be able to protect themselves and others from acquiring the virus that causes coronavirus disease. Of highest risk, and those first selected to be able to receive doses of the vaccines, were the elderly, healthcare professionals, and other individuals working in high-risk professions who are more predisposed to both transmit and become infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus. However, despite increased efforts to provide clinics to ensure that nursing home staff and residents receive the vaccine for their own protection and for that of others, the median vaccination coverage of nursing home staff was only 37.5% after the first round of clinics. As a result of this low vaccination rate, a study was undertaken which was recently published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society which looked at some of the potential factors for why some nursing homes had been more successful at garnering higher vaccination rates within their staff compared with other facilities.

The study surveyed 413 nursing homes with varied vaccine coverage among their staff as recorded between February 4<sup>th</sup>-March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, with vaccination rates reported as either low (<35%), medium (40-60%), or high (>75%). The study aimed to identify which factors may have had an influence on increased vaccination rates seen with the highly vaccinated homes. The 3 most common elements seen with successful programs included designating frontline staff champions, setting vaccination goals, and utilizing non-monetary staff rewards, such as T-shirts. In addition, it was shown that programs which utilized multiple strategies were also more likely to have higher success rates. Facilities that used 9 or more strategies were 3 times more likely to have a medium or high vaccination rate, compared to those which used fewer than 6 strategies, which were more likely to have lower rates.

Increasing nursing home staff vaccination rates is one way we can attempt to protect our high-risk patients from contracting a potentially deadly disease. Many of the individuals who work in these facilities do not work in healthcare, and may require education to dispel any misinformation they may believe or may have come across in the media or through other persons. For this reason, the strategies listed above in the study as those most effective should also be paired with staff education efforts whenever possible. It is important to identify and acknowledge the reasons why individuals may be hesitant to receive the vaccine, so that we can provide these individuals with the evidence-based information they require to make their decision going forward.

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