

The **Free Clinic** Research Collective

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A Shot of Hope

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Abstract

A third year medical student shares a reflection from the COVID-19 pandemic and from his first time administering a COVID-19 vaccine to a patient at The University of Oklahoma College of Medicine's student-run free clinic, Unity Clinic.

Reflection

It was a cold, crisp, windy January 2021 day in Oklahoma City, OK. The global community had been struggling to comprehend and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic for months now. During the past year, people all over the world had made immeasurable sacrifices to keep the pandemic from spiraling completely out of control and devastating our most vulnerable neighbors. As communal beings, we thrive on connectedness, social engagement, and daily interaction with others, but, for over a year, much of the connectedness that normally allows us to thrive has come to a halt. In order to keep hospitals from being overwhelmed with the sick and guard our vulnerable neighbors from acquiring COVID-19, most people avoided contact with others unless completely necessary and wore masks at all times. The world had embraced a new normal over the past year, and it changed everything as we knew it. But still, on that cold, crisp, windy January day on the great plains of the United States, there was hope emerging from a year of unprecedented morbidity, mortality, and disconnectedness.

When the FDA granted Emergency Authorization, our institution immediately started preparing to do our part to provide the COVID-19 vaccines to our community. Our institution's student-run free clinic (SRFC), Unity Clinic, had been asked to recruit, equip, and deploy hundreds of health professional students at The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

(OUHSC) to provide COVID-19 vaccines to vulnerable community members as soon as possible. During November and December of 2020, my classmates and I had been learning about the newly emerged COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna. We had been given instruction on vaccine preparation, vaccine risk factors and contraindications, vaccine administration, and post-vaccination patient safety monitoring. Hundreds of health professional students attended COVID-19 vaccine administration training and practiced administering normal saline into oranges with patient safety at the forefront of their minds. After a year of waiting and watching from the sidelines, we were all full of anticipation of the moment we would be able to contribute to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

At 7:30 AM in the morning on that January day, a cohort of student volunteers arrived at Unity Clinic and set up the first COVID-19 vaccine clinic. I was volunteering that day as a COVID-19 Vaccine Administrator and was assigned to one of the many stations where community members had come to receive their vaccine. As I awaited my first patient, I prepared the CDC vaccine card, “I got my COVID-19 vaccine” sticker, and vaccine information packet. After finishing my preparation, I sat there anxious about providing my first COVID-19 vaccine.

Around 8:00 AM, a patient was brought over and seated across from me at my station. This patient was an elderly woman and life-long Oklahoman. She shared with me the hope she felt in this moment and how grateful she was for the opportunity to receive the vaccine. I responded with gratitude that she would let me share this moment with her and provided her all the COVID-19 vaccine materials I had prepared for her. As we sat there, I felt an indescribable connection to her. We both sat there in solidarity as we fought the COVID-19 pandemic together. After administering the COVID-19 vaccine to her, I was overwhelmed with awareness of the truly special moment I had just been privileged to participate in. After an unprecedented year of morbidity and mortality, I had just administered a shot of Hope. Hope that the coming days will be better than the days of the recent past. Hope that we will get to spend quality time, in-person with our family and friends again. And, hope that we will find a new, better normal after rising above the COVID-19 pandemic in solidarity with one another.

Thankfully, this meaningful memory of administering a COVID-19 vaccine was not the last for myself or the mass vaccination campaign that occurred through Unity Clinic at OUHSC in Oklahoma. During my time volunteering at the clinic, I administered almost 40 COVID-19 vaccines to our most vulnerable patients. With almost 400 student volunteers between January and July of 2021, Unity Clinic administered over 40,000 COVID-19 vaccines to community members in the Greater Oklahoma City Area, which at the time made up over 11% of all the COVID-19 vaccines administered in Oklahoma County, the most populous county in Oklahoma.
