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Eye On Health

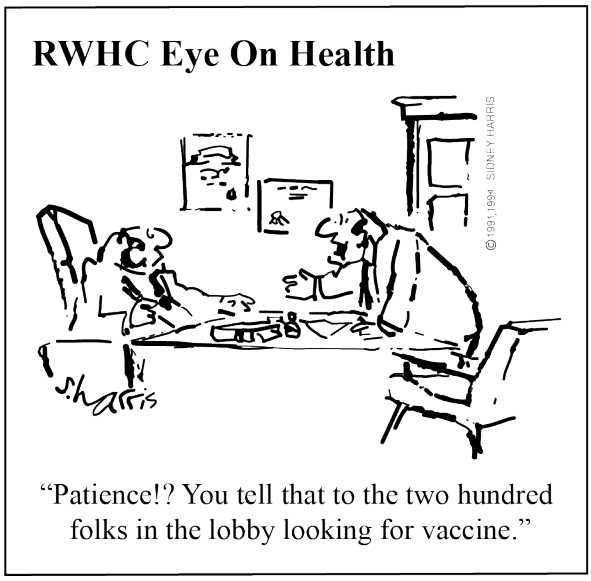
Review & Commentary on Health Policy Issues for a Rural Perspective – March 1, 2021

Our Current Hurdle: Vaccine Supply

From " 'We're all in the same boat': Urban, rural health officials strive to deliver vaccines. Supply shortage still main hurdle across state." *Channel3000.com*, 2/4:

"The pandemic has a way of making things feel far away, including loved ones, neighbors and a return to normalcy."

" 'We want to get out there and we want to vaccinate people,' said Jeff Jelinek, Sauk County Covid-19 incident commander. 'I mean, this is what we've been working on since March, just to get to this point.' "



"Patience!? You tell that to the two hundred folks in the lobby looking for vaccine."

"The rural parts of our state may seem especially out of reach. 'I think the biggest thing for us is resources. We do not have the amount of resources big, urban populations have,' Jelinek said. 'The great thing is, we do have a lot of great partners.' "

"Jelinek said in Sauk County, they have the benefit of established connections. The health department has been keeping close ties with hospitals including SSM Health St. Clare Hospital in Baraboo, going the distance to overcome any hurdles."

" 'We really are striving to make sure we deliver this vaccine as equitably as possible and we're able to reach everyone in our county,' said Treemanisha Stewart, Sauk County's new public health officer."

" 'There is a large rural population, and some of them have to travel great distances to get to local health care providers to get the vaccine,' said Dave Kitkowski, emergency preparedness specialist and safety manager at St. Clare Hospital."

"But other than that, Kitkowski said there isn't much of a difference between getting vaccinated in a rural area vs. an urban area within the SSM network, which has more than a dozen vaccination sites across Wisconsin."

" 'The process is a bit different for us, but in the eyes of a person coming in for a vaccine, it looks the same,' said Mo Kharbat, SSM regional vice president of pharmacy services. While Dane County has more people and health care workers, that's mostly balanced by more vaccinators."

" 'I think there's pros and cons to being in a rural area vs. an urban area,' said Tess Ellens, Covid-19 vaccine deputy with Public Health Madison & Dane County. 'Everyone's just doing their best to make sure we're getting vaccine out as soon as possible. For us that means scaling up at Alliant Energy Center to make sure we can get big fast. For other places, that might not be the case.' "

"When Upland Hills Health in Dodgeville held its first vaccination clinic for patients who qualified, 'It was very joyous,' said Vice President of Ancillary Services Krisann Karls. 'It's one of the highlights, I would say, of my career.' "

"At Upland Hills, Karls said they use the Moderna vaccine, which doesn't require as cold of storage as Pfizer's vaccine, making it preferable for rural areas. 'We are not seeing any specific challenges being in a rural setting,' she said. 'We have been receiving our vaccine in a timely manner.' "

"Karls said the hospital's barrier is one all health officials share: a lack of supply as they set out to vaccinate health care workers, first responders, people 65 and older and others currently eligible."

" 'We have not been getting enough Pfizer and Moderna vaccines as a state, not just as a health system,' Kharbat said. 'We request enough doses for our vaccine clinics across the Wisconsin region. However, we have been allocated only a third of what we request for the past two weeks in a row. If we receive more doses, we will certainly be able to vaccinate more people.' "

"Jelinek said the Sauk County Health Department received a quarter of what they requested last week. Typically, Karls said Upland Hills gets anywhere between 25 to 40% of its requested vaccine."



Wisconsin is facing a COVID-19 crisis, and our state MUST come together to help stop community spread. Additional public awareness is urgently needed about the seriousness of the pandemic and the critical need for preventative measures.

www.wha.org/stopthecovidspread

"It's an issue Wisconsin Department of Health Services officials addressed in a recent briefing. 'We have a terribly difficult situation with nearly 300,000 doses requested and only 27% we could provide,' said DHS Deputy Secretary Julie Willems Van Dijk. 'We're going to have to alter back and forth between places in the weeks to come as we continue to have a relatively small supply for the number of requests we are getting.' Willems Van Dijk noted they made changes to their formula determining where the doses go 'to more equitably distribute the vaccine across our state.' "

" 'We're all in the same boat in this, whether in urban or rural settings,' Karls said, noting Upland Hills is working closely with partners, as well. 'We're all collaborating together to make sure we can get vaccines out as quickly as we can.' That collaboration brings a return to normalcy closer."

" 'I think the biggest thing would be patience,' Jelinek said. 'Not just the public having patience. We need to have patience as well.' "

"Kitkowski stressed it's still as important to keep up precautions such as physical distancing and mask-wearing during the vaccination process. 'Things we're already doing making sure we're keeping ourselves and our neighbors as safe as possible.' "

Our Next Hurdle: Vaccine Hesitancy

"Vaccine Hesitancy vs. Vaccine Refusal" *NPR*, 2/9:

"It had been months since Tremellia Hobbs had an excuse to bring out the pompoms. Before the pandemic, they were a crowd favorite at movie nights and bingo tournaments that Hobbs organized as activities director at the Brian Center Health & Retirement/Cabarrus nursing home."

Eye On Health is the monthly newsletter of the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative. Begun in 1979, RWHC has as its **Mission** that rural Wisconsin communities will be the healthiest in America. Our **Vision** is that... RWHC is a strong and innovative cooperative of diversified rural hospitals... it is the "rural advocate of choice" for its Members... it develops and manages a variety of products and services... it assists Members to offer high quality, cost-effective healthcare… assists Members in partnerships to make their communities healthier… generates additional revenue by services to non-Members… ongoing use of strategic alliances in pursuit of its Vision. Tim Size <**timsize@rwhc.com**>, Editor, 880 Independence Lane, Sauk City, WI 53583

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"On Jan. 14, she finally had a reason. After nearly a year of living with pandemic restrictions and a summer outbreak that killed 10 residents and infected 30 staff members, the nursing home was hosting its first Covid-19 vaccine clinic."

"So Hobbs lifted the red and silver tassels into the air and cheered as her co-workers lined up to get shots from two visiting CVS pharmacists. 'Stewart, Stewart, he's our man! If he can't do it, no one can! Goooo, Stewart!' "

"But even as Hobbs rooted for her colleagues, decorated the dining hall with green and blue balloons, and assembled goodie bags with Life Savers gummies for those who received their shots, she knew she wouldn't be getting the vaccine herself."

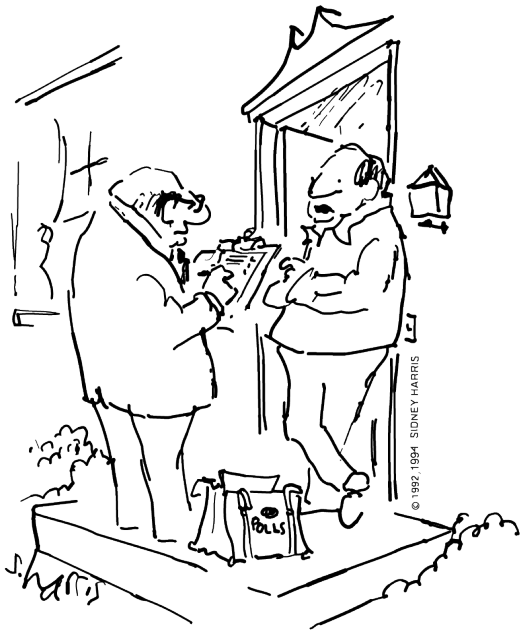
" 'Being able to diagnose, come up with a vaccine and administer it all within the same year just seems a little puzzling,' she said. 'I would like to see, give it a little more Hobbs' hesitancy has been echoed by nursing home staff members across the state and country. But her reasoning–as well as that of her colleagues who also opted against the vaccine that day–goes far beyond a simple yes or no. The decision is complicated and multifaceted, they said, which means persuading them to say yes will be, too."

"In North Carolina, the health secretary has said more than half of nursing home workers are declining the vaccine. A national survey found that 15% of health care workers who had been offered the vaccine said no, with nursing home personnel more likely to refuse than hospital staffers."

"The trend has concerned public health officials, who say vaccines are among the best ways to protect vulnerable elderly residents who may be infected by asymptomatic staff members. Although long-term care facilities house less than 1% of the nation's population, they've accounted for 37% of covid deaths, according to the COVID Tracking Project."

"Early reports suggest nursing home residents are getting vaccinated at a higher rate than workers. A CDC analysis of more than 11,000 long-term care facilities found that in the first month of vaccinations, about 78% of residents got at least one dose, but only 38% of staffers did."

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"I'm less a 'no' and more a 'slow yes'."

"But some nursing home staffers say their reluctance is being misconstrued. Most are not saying they'll never take the vaccine, but simply that they have concerns about such a new product. They understand it went through months of clinical trials, but what about possible long-term side effects, for instance? Or how did politics play into the development process? For communities of color, their historical mistreatment by the medical system can also factor into the decision."

" 'We should stop saying that people are just saying no,' said Dr. Kimberly Manning, a professor at Emory University School of Medicine who is participating in the Moderna vaccine trial. A Black physician herself, she has been speaking with many Black Americans about the vaccine and instead refers to people as 'slow yeses.' "

" 'We are too impatient to get to the point where we let them get to their yes,' she said. 'We're like the us-car salesman. We're just trying to close the deal.' "

"But human beings respond better to empathy and patience than to pressure, Manning said. She tries to ask people about their individual concerns and work from there. Sometimes it's skepticism about the government's intentions. Other times it's worry about how the vaccine may interact with fertility treatments."

" 'It's important to not lump anybody into a group and say 'How dare you just not get vaccinated?' because you're a health care worker,' she said. 'You're still a person.' "

" 'I totally trust the science. I love Dr. Fauci,' Hobbs said. 'My thing is the timing.' "

"She wants to wait and see how others who get the shots fare. In the meantime, Hobbs said, she'll continue masking, physical distancing and sanitizing–all of which have kept her covid-free for 10 months and which she hopes will continue to protect the residents, all of whom she knows by name and favorite activity."

"Caitlyn Huneycutt, a certified nursing assistant at the center, also opted out of getting a shot–but for an entirely different set of reasons. She expects covid vaccinations will be mandated for health workers in the future, much like other immunizations. And she'll get them then. But for now, she's still weighing the risks."

"She recently started a new medication and is not sure how it'll interact with the vaccine. She doesn't want to bring covid home to her 1-year-old daughter, but she's also heard of people who received the vaccine and fainted or developed kidney infections. (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not list either of these as common side effects for the two covid vaccines in use.) 'I want to make sure I'm going to be healthy if I take it,' Huneycutt said."

"Across the country, nursing homes are taking different approaches to persuade their staffs to get vaccinated. SavaSeniorCare, which owns the Brian Center/Cabarrus, has offered cash to its 169 long-term care homes in 20 states to pay for gift cards, parties or other incentives. For over a month now, the company has also been hosting weekly phone calls to educate staffers about the vaccine and making Sava doctors and pharmacists available to answer questions."



"At least one nursing home chain in the U.S. announced it will require all employees to receive a vaccine, but most others have not yet done so."

"In total, about 48% of staff members and 64% of residents at the center received their first dose of vaccine that day. The numbers are well below Sava's goal of 90%, Reed said, but the pharmacists will return for two more clinics in the coming months."

" 'The people that didn't get it [today] will see that the guys that got the shot are OK,' Reed said. 'When the next clinic comes up, they will not hesitate to get their first shot. It ought to go much better.' "

The Rural Renaissance

From "The Rural Renaissance," a *Commentary on Community Economics*, by Michael Shuman, Director, Local Economies Programs, Neighborhood Associates Corporation

"**If you believe the portrait of rural America depicted in the Netflix film Hillbilly Elegy, you might conclude that its residents are hopelessly impoverished, addicted, and depressed**. That's also the view of Eduardo Porter in 'The Hard Truth of Trying to 'Save' Rural America,' whose much-discussed piece in *The New York Times* argues that the economic decline of rural America is so severe and irreversible that it may be better just to write it off and encourage its residents to move into nearby cities."
"Yet as Mark Sappenfield writes in the Christian Science Monitor, a far better representative of rural America is Cassie Chambers Armstrong:

Ms. Armstrong is author of Hill Women, which chronicles the generations of strong, resourceful Appalachian women who helped her on her way to three Ivy League degrees. 'The impression is that it is so broken that it can only be saved if outsiders swoop in to res-

cue it,' she tells me. But Appalachia 'has all the skills it needs to solve its own problems.' "

"I met another incredible rural woman about six weeks ago in rural North Carolina. Judy Carpenter, an award-winning trap and field shooter, is now investing her life savings into creating a model sustainable agriculture destination called Lucky Clays Farm. She invited me to lead a workshop on 'Healing the Urban-Rural Divide.' I suggested to a room full of socially- distanced state and local economic developers that Stanly County, the rural locale we were in, should pursue a bunch of mutually beneficial projects with the fast-growing city of Charlotte, an hour's drive west. Among them:

- Diversify the food-growing capacity of Stanly County, where land is plentiful, to ease food insecurity in Charlotte. Lucky Clays Farm itself is prototyping hydroponic and aquaponic growing methods with urban sales in mind.

- Upgrade the internet infrastructure in Stanly, so that entrepreneurs from Charlotte can take advantage of Stanly's more affordable commercial rents to launch a range of innovative businesses serving regional needs.

- Create a rural tourist destination in Stanly where rat-race-weary Charlotte residents can catch a weekend break. Again, Lucky Clays Farm has anticipated this by building getaway homes and a Wellness Center and by developing a modest hotel and foody restaurant.

- Deploy a regional online platform for financing these businesses and projects through investment crowd-funding."

"These kinds of projects, I suggested, not only would increase regional prosperity but also much-needed social harmony and understanding. The Cook Political Report recently published a provocative piece entitled 'Density as Destiny,' noting that Bloomberg/CityLab has performed a preliminary analysis of the November election and found a political tipping point at 700 people per square mile. Rural counties with fewer than 500 residents per square mile were reliably Republican, while urban counties with over 1,500 residents per square mile were reliably Democrat. Those in between, suburban and exurban counties, were purplish and up for grabs politically. Regional efforts to bring together urban and rural neighbors can thus begin to heal the gaping political wounds in our country."

"Honestly, I've long been pretty skeptical of regionalism. Most regional bodies promote the worst kinds of economic development, like heavily subsiding corporate attractions, and lack the democratic checks and balances that characterize local and county governments. But regional *projects* that involve localities working together on focused and transparent initiatives are more promising."

"Not a few progressive urbanites think this is a fool's errand. But they are ignoring clear signs of vitality in rural America. Internet connectivity is reaching more households and businesses. The average age of farmers is finally declining as more young people choose to become local-food farmers. Water quality is improving. Recent immigrants, unable to find affordable housing in cities, now diversify once all-white rural communities. According to the 2016 Census, rural households had higher rates of home ownership, more stable families, and lower rates of poverty than their urban counterparts. Little wonder that many rural counties (not all, of course) are experiencing a significant growth in population."

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"In preparing for my Lucky Clays talk, I read several books by North Carolina's celebrated demographer, Michael L. Walden, at North Carolina State University. His work documents the transformation of North Carolina from a mostly rural state to an increasingly urban one. In his 2008 book, *North Carolina in the Connected Age*, he ends a chapter on the state's future with a series of questions:

'Will retail outlets become obsolete as online shopping becomes more sophisticated? Will shopping malls become ghost towns, and if so, could this change improve traffic congestion but decimate local governments' property tax revenues? Will further breakthroughs in communications and virtualization turn the home into the workplace, thereby dramatically reducing commuting costs for millions of workers? Could improvements in online education replace lecture halls as the way millions of college students learn and thereby save the state government billions of dollars in spending to construct and maintain college buildings?'"



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"Yes, yes, yes, and yes. But the driving force is not just technology, as Walden predicted, but COVID-19. The pandemic has fundamentally turned upside down the way we organize our buying behavior, our work lives, and our educational institutions. Don't expect things to return to 'normal' once vaccines are distributed. We have all learned lessons this past year about simplifying and improving our lives by staying at home more and deepening our roots in our communities. And these lessons, I would argue, will incentivize more of us to participate in urban-based businesses by living in rural settings."

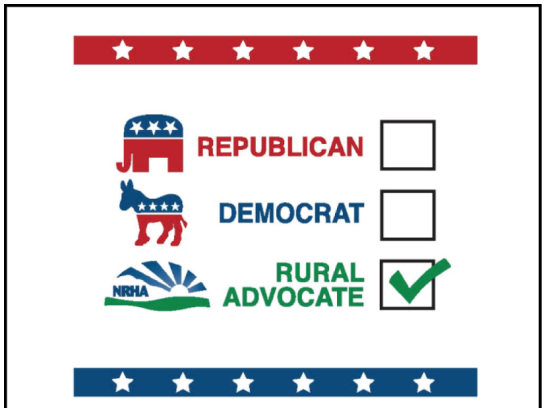
"Fifty years ago, rural communities were strictly defined by industries based on their natural resources—farms, fisheries, forestry, mining, and tourism. A few support services grew around the workers and companies in these industries, but if the big mining company or paper processor that anchored the industry shut down, usually the entire economy collapsed. These communities were fragile, undiversified, and impoverished. Even Jane Jacobs insisted in her *Economy of Cities* that these communities were little more than 'supply regions' for cities."

"Today, many of these same communities are experiencing a renaissance, as is apparent in Norwood, North Carolina, where Lucky Clays Farm is located. Rural regions now can provide early-stage entrepreneurs with low-cost housing, commercial space, and internet connectivity. They can offer a lower cost of living to retirees, who then bring their substantial pension, Social Security, and Medicare payments into the local economy. A growing number of us will embrace rural as places we love where we can reshape our professional and work lives to serve our quality of life."

"**None of this is meant to diminish the many challenges rural America faces. Compared to urban areas, for example, rural communities struggle for decent access to health care and in-person education. But the biggest challenge rural communities face, I would argue, is contempt and condescension from snooty urbanites. Whether you are a city mouse (as I am) or a country mouse, please consider reaching out to the other side of America. Our future as a nation depends on it**."

Shuman's latest book, "Put Your Money Where Your Life Is," is highly recommended by RWHC.

If you're interested in an online workshop for your community on post-COVID reconstruction, email ***shuman@igc.org****. Please put "WORKSHOP INFO" in the subject line.*



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Leadership Insights: "Mediating Conflict"

The *Leadership Insights* series is by Jo Anne Preston, RWHC Workforce & Organizational Development Senior Manager. Back issues at **www.RWHC.com**.

I just got a German Shepherd puppy, and my little old dog is not happy. Their conflicts are stressing me out. How much do I let them "sort it out" between them, and when do I intervene before someone gets injured? How do I know it's serious or just their way of communicating who's boss? Every expert has a different approach; what is the best way? And is all that growling really necessary??

It's not so different with people sometimes. Managers often tell me that addressing conflict is the worst part of the job, especially when new in the role. You won't likely get bitten, but it's messy, getting in between two people who are fighting. Perhaps it's a strong personality clash, or world views that are polar opposites. But managed well, people *can* work effectively with those whom they disagree or even dislike. Use an ounce of prevention with clear expectations and standards, and address problems when they are small.

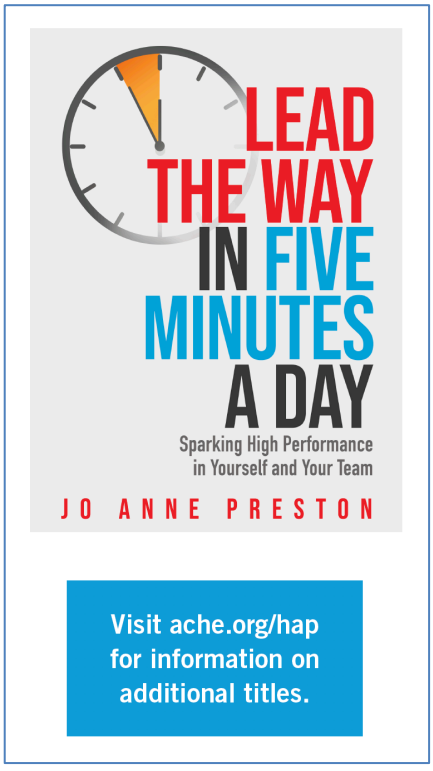
But when the growling gets too loud, show leadership. Mediating well takes experience and training, but sometimes you just have to step in and do your best. Believe in yourself. Joseph Grenny in **Vital Smarts Crucial Skills newsletter** said, "If people are ok with your intent, they will be ok with your content." Get your heart and head in the right place and you are most of the way there. Beyond that, here is a crash course mediation plan:

Set the stage. *"My intention is to help you two come to a resolution that you can both agree to. To be clear, what is going on right now cannot continue and you are the only ones who can fix it. I believe you can, and I'm going to do my best to help you."*

Establish clear ground rules. *"The first step is to agree to some ground rules to help this conversation go well. What are some guidelines that would help everyone feel safer to speak up here?"* Suggest a couple if needed to start (e.g. no raised voices, one person talk at a time, no name-calling, etc.). Write these down and refer to them if necessary as you go.

Clearly define the problem. *"One at a time, I'd like each of you to state three things: 1) what you see is the core of the problem, focusing on observable behaviors, not judgments; 2) what you want or need from the other; and, 3) what your contribution has been to the situation-everyone owns some part of the responsibility for a conflict. Then, I will ask the other to restate what they understood you to say. It doesn't mean you agree, it just will show you are listening and trying to understand."* Sometimes when a misunderstanding about needs is cleared up, the problem can be resolved right here. Tip: If you have the opportunity, ask them to write the answers to these questions in advance of your meeting.

Address an unwillingness to resolve. If you get stuck, ask, *"What will be the cost if you can't resolve this?"* Sometimes when faced with the reality what a continued conflict will produce, people will warm to compromise.



Listen for and give voice to common ground. *"It sounds like (x) is important to both of you. How can you use that as a foundation for coming up with some solutions that meet both your needs?"* Encourage creativity.

Focus on the future. *"The past can't be changed. Talk specifically about how you will each contribute to making the future better in your working relationship."* If you have two employees who don't like each other, that may not change, but they can agree to actions that will keep anyone from knowing about it. As a leader, it is perfectly acceptable for you to let people know that this is your expectation.

Close the loop. Have each person state what they will do. Don't settle for "I'll be more respectful." Insist on specifics, e.g. "I will say good morning each day, promise not to talk about them to others, etc." Set a follow-up meeting for accountability, and make sure it happens. THANK them–this is hard work. Restate your intention and any expectations you have going forward, even if you think they seem obvious.

In general:

- Don't listen to one side privately. You will form a bias and to mediate you need to remain neutral.
- Model a calm presence. One way to maintain this is active listening, which can also serve to slow down reactions.
- If you get overwhelmed, or they do, take a break.
- Your job is not to come up with their solutions.
- Your job is to create a safe space, keep the focus on future solutions, and guide people to follow the rules they agreed to."

Contact Jo Anne Preston for individual or group coaching at ***jpreston@RWHC.com*** *or 608-644-3261. For info re the RWHC Leadership Series go to* **www.RWHC.com/Services.aspx** *or contact Carrie Ballweg at* ***cballweg@RWHC.com*** *or 608-643-2343.*

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