

# Saving Lives, One Vaccine At A Time

By Brenda M. Silvia-Torma, MEd, CHES ®

Pride. Joy. Gratitude. These feelings floated through me every day while working at Inova's Stonebridge COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic located on Eisenhower Avenue in Alexandria, VA. Between December 14th and July 1st, the Inova team administered nearly 450,000 vaccine doses, which helped open our world after 15 long months of isolation.

## Seamless and Well-Coordinated

I began working at the clinic on April 17, 2021, two weeks after my second COVID dose. My first thought was how well-coordinated and seamless the

vaccination process was conducted. The clinic's space was ample and could serve more than 4,000 people each day. Long lines did not compromise safety--patients were spaced 6 feet apart with the aid of clearly marked circles on the floors throughout the building--and Inova team members and volunteers were joyful and played celebratory music. This positive atmosphere was consistent throughout my time at the clinic. National Guard staff, volunteers from Volunteer Fairfax and Community Emergency Response Team, and Inova Health System, and deployed Inova team members from many departments worked together to get the community back up on its collective feet.

## Making a Positive Impact

Between April 17 and July 1, I worked in all areas of the clinic. I checked people in for their appointments, providing them with a friendly first impression of the service they were receiving. I identified clients who needed accommodations due to a disability or health issue and supported them through the vaccination process. I was a "pharmacy runner" and delivered vaccine doses to the nurses, and I monitored patients after receiving the vaccine, checking for any sign of allergic reactions or discomfort. All areas (intake, registration, vaccination, recovery, etc.) were essential components of the vaccination process and required compassionate and attentive team members and volunteers.

## Challenges and Innovation

During my second day at the clinic, the building's Internet system went down, and the line of people was on hold for several minutes. Immediately, supervising team members put "Plan B" into action and distributed paper copies of forms needed to be completed by patients. As I was distributing

documents, I met a woman who was deaf and did not understand why there was a delay. Because we were all wearing masks, she could not read my lips. I asked her to follow me using my hands, and I walked her into the clinic. She handed me a piece of paper and pencil, and I wrote that I getting her an American Sign Language (ASL) medical interpreter.

I asked if it would be alright if I stayed with her through the vaccination process. I wanted to ensure she did not need to explain herself again to a different team member. She agreed. Soon after, the Inova interpreter appeared on a transportable computer, and she interpreted what I said. I spent the next 30 minutes with the patient and learned

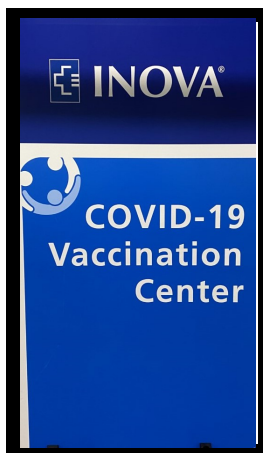
first-hand the difficulty of navigating this pandemic without hearing what people are saying or seeing their faces. ASL is a beautiful and expressive language. However, when someone cannot see a person's entire face, the language is more challenging to understand fully.

Working with the medical interpreter was extremely helpful. Together, we made this patient's vaccination experience much smoother and less stressful than it otherwise would have been. As I walked her out of the clinic, she gave me the heart sign and conveyed her gratitude. That day was just one of many when I was either a participant or a witness to something that filled me with pride to be an Inova team member.

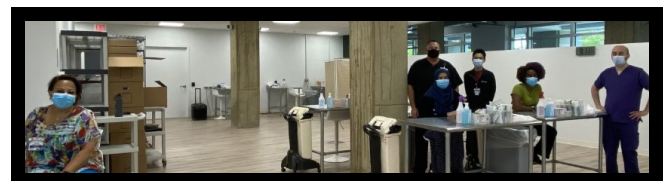
## Excellent Stewards of Valuable Resources

During my time working in the pharmacy, I hand-delivered vaccines to the nurses who

gave the doses to members of our community and observed the nurses' kind and calm demeanor and their thoughtful responses to patients' concerns. I also witnessed the vigilant stewardship of the pharmacists, who did not waste vaccine doses. After a pharmacist opened a vial containing five doses of the vaccine, we needed to use them within 6 hours. As a result, the pharmacists opened fewer doses in advance during the afternoon. We monitored the number of doses at the nurse's tables and only opened a vial if a patient arrived and needed one. The mindfulness of the pharmacists' was inspiring and further reminded me that each dose is priceless.



*Inova Signage at the Stonebridge Vaccination Clinic*



*Some of the Inova Pharmacy Staff at the Inova Stonebridge Clinic.*

## Calming Nerves

While in the pharmacy, I also learned about a resource that Inova uses to help people who fear needles get their shots. [Buzzy Bees](#), pictured below, distract a person from feeling the injection by numbing the area with its vibrations. I saw it used at the clinic, and the patient was surprised that he did not feel anything. This resource is a research-based method of alleviating anxiety in patients and supports those who might not otherwise get their vaccine.



## Importance of Monitoring Clients

Another support provided by Inova at its vaccine clinic is the presence of emergency personnel. Many people with prior anaphylactic reactions to medication received their vaccinations at Inova. Inova Well team members, including nurses and EMTs, closely monitored patients for allergic reactions or discomfort. Patients were at ease, knowing that they would be in the best place possible to receive help if they had an adverse reaction. In addition, Inova Well administrative team members monitored those patients who did not have a history of anaphylactic reactions.



*Monitoring area at the Stonebridge Clinic.*

Monitoring played an essential role in ensuring the safety of our patients. If someone had an adverse response after their shot, it was our responsibility to get medical help right away. We approached the role with diplomacy and friendliness and helped them pass the time in a welcoming environment. On occasion, I noticed some clients who appeared to be feeling 'off' or having some discomfort. I would immediately check on them and alert the nurses and EMTs, who were only a few feet away.

I was grateful for the nearby healthcare providers. They were available to answer questions and, if need be, take over monitoring. Our patients consistently mentioned how smoothly their vaccination process went and we encouraged them to tell everyone they knew to come to Inova to get their first and second shots.

## Nearly 450,000 Vaccine Doses

In total, Inova vaccinated 9 percent of all of Virginia and more than 25 percent of Northern Virginia. This

achievement is a representation of Inova's mission to put patients first. Inova team members and volunteers came together to serve the community, and the community is grateful. Every day, my colleagues and I were thanked for our service to the community. I was always surprised to hear their gratitude because I am thankful for them, grateful that they came to get vaccinated to help those who cannot.

## Next Steps

In the coming weeks, Inova will provide pop-up COVID-19 vaccine clinics in areas of Virginia that are in need. More details will be available soon on Inova's website, <https://www.inova.org/COVID19/vaccine-scheduling>.



*Inova Signage at the Stonebridge Clinic in Alexandria, VA.*

## Resources:

- [Inova COVID-19 Information for the Community](#)
- [Inova Interpretation Services](#)
- [Vaccinate Virginia](#)
- [Virginia Department of Health Vaccination Summary](#)
- [Buzzy: Take The Sting Out of Shots](#)
- [Research Article About Buzzy](#)

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