

Title: Alaska assisted living home immunization program: a multidisciplinary, community health initiative for underserved populations in Southcentral Alaska

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Abstract Text:

Purpose: Vaccine preventable diseases are a significant public health issue in Alaska. Residents of assisted living homes (ALH) are especially susceptible to these illnesses, due largely to living in close quarters with others, typically being over the age of 65, and having more co-morbidities on average. With seasonal influenza vaccination rates down 3.1 percent to 70.4 percent from 2015-2018 in residents 65 and older, there exists a significant need for local, community-based initiatives to vaccinate the at risk and underserved populations of ALHs and the health care workers providing their care. The objectives of this program were to 1) combat increased incidence of influenza in the State of Alaska, specifically among the high-risk, ALH population; 2) immunize all consenting ALH residents; 3) increase herd immunity through immunization of healthcare workers and resident family member; 4) expand program outreach within Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Valley (Mat-Su); 5) provide University of Alaska Anchorage student volunteers the opportunity to learn and master organizational, planning, communication, collaboration, professionalism, and time management skills as leaders within this program.

Methods: Students from the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)/Idaho State University (ISU) Doctor of Pharmacy program assumed responsibility for and enhanced a pre-existing multidisciplinary initiative consisting of pharmacy students, nursing students from the UAA School of Nursing, and volunteer healthcare providers from the community. Community partners, including Providence Medical Group, Kalgin Freelance Partnership, and the Anchorage Benton Bay Lions Club, were secured, providing vaccines and monetary support to the program. ALHs were contacted directly, program interest established, and vaccine recipient demographic data collected, allowing individuals to be pre-screened via VakTrAK, the state immunization tracking system. All volunteers received situationally-based interactive training prior to the event. Student volunteers completed simulation training utilizing the occupational therapy apartment at UAA to familiarize them with residence interactions in ALHs. Seventeen teams, consisting of 66 volunteers, traveled 28,000 square miles across Anchorage and Mat-Su Valley, administering influenza vaccines over two weekends in October, 2019.

Results: In Southcentral Alaska, 106 of the 566 registered ALHs (18 percent) were contacted and 71 (12.5 percent) participated. Volunteers screened 625 patients before the event and 28 while on site. From this, 497 total vaccines were administered. Approximately 11.7 percent of all ALH residents in Southcentral Alaska were vaccinated (n=358). Additionally, most volunteer healthcare providers, ALH staff, and resident family members were vaccinated (n=139). Of the 625 ALH residents scheduled for vaccinations, 110 were not present, 16 were already immunized, and 52 declined immunization for various reasons.

Conclusion: Influenza and other vaccine preventable diseases will remain a significant medical issue for residents of ALHs in Alaska. In-home vaccinations of underserved, high-risk, largely non-mobile populations has shown to decrease preventable morbidity and mortality, lowering overall community health burden. Continued recruitment efforts of community medical professionals, along with multidisciplinary student involvement, lays the foundation for ALH program sustainability and growth. Use of multidisciplinary medical teams provide program volunteers and the public valuable exposure to the skill sets of various medical providers, increasing public knowledge and interdisciplinary collaboration.