

COVID: What We Have Learned

An Administrator's Perspective by Sonya Newton, Ozark Campus Administrator

*I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear;
even I will carry, and will deliver you. – Isaiah 46:4*

As an administrator in healthcare, I can tell you many stories where God was faithful to carry me or deliver me through challenging times. This recent exposure to COVID in our facility would prove to be no different...

The Baptist Home in Ozark was able to keep the virus out for many months but was exposed in October 2020. As we listened to stories of all the facilities in our area being significantly impacted, we tried to learn and prepare. Screening of all staff before entering the facility by asking questions and taking temperatures was initiated in March 2020. We started ongoing random testing of staff in June thinking this would help us identify asymptomatic staff, but this still did not prove effective enough. Why?

The answer to this question, along with others, would be granted as we went through the process of battling COVID in our home. Here is what I have learned:

Many people are infectious without being sick. As residents and staff tested positive with COVID, the Director of Nursing and I would notify staff of the test results. Several people were shocked to hear that they had tested positive. The fact is that there are many symptoms of COVID, or you may not have any symptoms at all.

COVID has many symptoms. The most common symptoms of COVID are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Less common symptoms noted were headache, fatigue, stomach upset, diarrhea, loss of taste or smell, rashes and more. The truth is you can have one symptom, multiple symptoms, or no symptoms. I was charged with the task of reporting each case to the local health department and the Department of Health and Senior Services. Upon asking staff if they had any symptoms, I would get responses like, "I had one loose stool on Saturday, but I thought it was because I had Mexican food." Another comment was, "Well, I have been tired lately, but I am always tired." Frequently the response was, "I have had a stuffy nose, but thought it was my allergies."

COVID affects everyone differently. As you can tell by the symptoms, some were so mild that people did not know they had the virus. Others were affected more severely. It was shocking to see that age did not matter as much as underlying health conditions. What I will say is that COVID is like a roller coaster ride for two to three weeks. You have highs and lows. Good days and bad days with the virus. Some would start out with mild symptoms but would suddenly turn worse. Because of this, the doctors asked for updates every four hours on several of the residents.

Mortality rates were less than the media forecast. COVID can cause loss of life. However, doctors have learned what treatments work best, so it is not automatic. We are grateful to the physicians that service our facility and local hospitals.

Testing is a false sense of security. Because of the long incubation period, test results that are negative can give you a false sense of security. As we did ongoing facility testing, we moved all positive residents to a designated COVID unit. The first round of testing resulted in 17 positive residents, but within 2 weeks, we had a total of 27. We had a few residents test negative, but in a few short days, those same residents tested positive with additional testing.

Weight loss is something that must be battled. Many residents and staff lost their sense of taste and smell. This had an impact on the desire to eat. Other residents had fatigue and stated they were too tired to eat. As a facility, we pushed things like Gatorade, popsicles, shakes, ice cream, etc. Many residents experienced weight loss, and it is an ongoing battle to build them back up.

Masks work. There has been controversy over whether people should wear masks. We have noticed that wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment helps reduce the spread of the virus. It is a virus. It is here. We must face it. Until there is an appropriate vaccine, this is something we must face like any other virus.

The last things that I have learned are that in adversity, you see the true character of people, and that God is faithful. I saw so many of the staff of The Baptist Home rise to the challenges that we faced. We pulled together as a team, worked countless hours, and we were not alone. God was with us in this fight. As an administrator, I am forever grateful.