

## **Vaccine Distribution Op-Ed: “If We’re Fighting a War, Who’s the General? Because We’re Losing”**

There is no shortage of comparisons to describe what medical providers face every day while they try to keep up with a pandemic spiraling out of control. One common way to frame the situation is to describe the country at war and a lack of hospital beds and supplies are forcing providers to practice “battlefield” medicine – a framing shared by providers in the field and policymakers alike.

Keeping in line with this comparison, it’s clear that we’re losing the war but even worse it seems that we don’t have a General in charge to look to for direction or accountability. Our state and federal leaders are pointing the finger at each other while millions of doses sit idle and providers are stuck in the trenches.

I have the privilege of serving as the President and CEO for Capital Caring Health, a non-profit hospice and palliative care provider in Washington D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. I also serve as CEO of the National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation (NPHI), which is comprised of 72 not-for-profit community-based hospice and palliative care providers. Members of NPHI care for daily over 100,000 patients – many who are terminally ill and COVID 19 positive. We see first-hand the tragedy and suffering of far too many American families.

Our front-line clinical staffs have risen to the occasion to care for patients and their families during a pandemic only to be met with the dysfunction and chaos of the vaccine rollout. We are no strangers to death, grief, and loss and serve not just a clinical role in the care of patients and their families but as spiritual and mental counselors. We understand like other healthcare providers that this pandemic has created a sense of grief and loss across the country that is simply unsustainable.

The delayed and jumbled distribution of recently authorized COVID-19 vaccines unfortunately acts as the latest example of our leaders outsourcing any responsibility down the chain of command with those below either unable or unwilling to pick up the pieces.

As of January 7th, the CDC [indicated](#) that approximately 21.5 million doses of the vaccine have been distributed yet only about 6 million have been administered. As thousands continue to succumb to the virus daily, the pace of allocating the vaccine and administering it is a failure of leadership which constitutes a national crisis.

In many states, the shocking lack of coordination and communication between federal, state, and local officials with health care providers has led to vaccine doses going unused and allocated inefficiently. I acknowledge that some across the country have had different experiences in the acquisition and administration of the vaccines, but it is critical we get this right everywhere and not just here and there.

### **What Must Happen Now Without Delay.**

Our best hope for ending this pandemic is for federal, state, and local officials pick up the mantle and lead where others have fallen short. We must immediately begin to stand up centralized vaccination sites across the country operating twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week until we can declare “Mission Complete.” This is a crisis that leaves no room for pause.

We must also recognize that every state and locality have access to different resources and infrastructure which is why the federal government should be offer a menu of options for where these vaccination sites can operate and how they can be staffed.

The very availability of multiple, highly effective vaccines is an astounding scientific and medical accomplishment and it is an amazing example of government and the private sector working together at record speed for the common good. It would therefore be an unspeakable tragedy if all the effort and sacrifices we've made thus far only lead to more needless deaths due to a disjointed distribution process. We are not just hoping for rapid vaccine deployment, we are counting on it so we may return from the "battlefield" having wiped out this terrible virus as we have done in the past by conquering smallpox, polio, and other diseases and saving millions of lives that otherwise would have been lost.

**About the National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation**

The National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation (NPHI) is a collaborative of 70+ not-for-profit, community-integrated, hospice and palliative care providers from across the United States who play a unique role as a crucial safety net for the sickest, most vulnerable patients in the communities they serve. For more information, visit [www.hospiceinnovations.org](http://www.hospiceinnovations.org).

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