

Vaccine distribution

Operation Warp Speed is delivering vaccines at a slow pace. At the time I wrote this column, health care professionals were only delivering a half a million doses a day. At this pace, it will take over three years to give everyone

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the two shots the current vaccines require. Surely, this pace will pick up as we devote more resources to this task and learn better methods. In the meantime, our country should make adjustments

to get more vaccinations into arms. We can do a better job, just using the resources we already have.

One of the big problems our country faces is that we are making vaccines faster than we can administer them. We should make some quick changes to alleviate this problem. For instance, most states are giving nursing home residents high priority, so they are among the first to get shots. The logic behind this emphasis makes sense. These people are vulnerable because they live in close quarters, and we have already seen far too many of them die.

Despite the benefits of targeting nursing home residents, this policy comes at a cost. It takes time for

pharmacists to travel to the nursing homes. Also, some residents and staff refuse to get shots. Pharmacists express the hope that the staff and residents, who refused to get their first shots, may change their minds and get them later when the pharmacists come back. Catering to these people will force pharmacists to make more than two trips to many nursing homes. As you can see, these extra trips soak up time that could be put to other uses.

We should adopt a policy that allows medical personnel to use their time more efficiently. Pharmacists should not go to a nursing home until the home can document that 100 percent (or 95 percent or some other threshold) of its staff and residents agree to get the vaccine. This proposal will cut back on the time pharmacists spend traveling, since they will be able to stay in one place more often and deliver the vaccine to those willing to travel to get it. If we can make patients, rather than pharmacists, spend time traveling, we can deliver many more shots.

In order to make sure the people giving shots do not have any downtime, the groups that are eligible to get the shots should be expanded. Recently, our governor moved first responders to this group. I think this was a good policy move, but the governor will face criticism for

his decision. One could argue that other groups should have been given priority. Some people make the case for teachers, and others make it for the elderly. These arguments all have merit, but it is important to make sure someone is getting the shots. We should not waste time deliberating over who should be in the next group because getting shots into almost anyone's arm has a benefit – as more people get shots, the virus will spread more slowly.

Additionally, the federal government can play a larger role. For instance, we can call up the National Guard with medical training and deploy military medical staff to deliver inoculations. With these people, we can hold mass inoculation events that target specific groups. One day could be devoted to teachers, another to the elderly, and so on.

Our country faces a large logistical challenge as it tries to vaccinate our citizens against the coronavirus. This task is too big for anyone to reasonably expect it to be done perfectly. However, we should expect our leaders to learn from their mistakes and to make adjustments when necessary. The governor's move to allow first responders to be inoculated is a good first step, and I hope to see further steps in the very near future.