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Ascension Wisconsin Administers COVID-19 Vaccine to Frontline Caregivers in Appleton

Appleton, Wis. Today, at 3:15 p.m., Ascension Wisconsin administered the COVID-19 vaccine to its first Appleton-area caregivers. The vaccine was administered during a final walk-through in preparation for launching associate vaccine clinics in northeast Wisconsin this weekend.

"I am extremely excited that this day has arrived and am honored to be among the first people to receive the COVID-19 vaccine," said Dr. Anthony Zeimet, DO, Infectious Diseases Specialist, Ascension Wisconsin. "Caring for patients with COVID-19 is a team effort and for healthcare workers...and everyone...this is a sign of the beginning of the end. This is a hopeful time and a great scientific breakthrough. It's a wonderful Christmas gift for us all."

Dr. Zeimet was the first of six Ascension Wisconsin associates who received vaccinations today, including:

- Satish Achanti, MD, Hospitalist, Ascension Wisconsin
- Leslie Buck, RN, COVID-19 Unit, Ascension St. Elizabeth
- Katie Hale, RN, Intensive Care Unit, Ascension Mercy
- Simon Ly, Respiratory Therapist, Ascension St. Elizabeth
- Jenny O'Brien, RN, Intensive Care Unit, Ascension St. Elizabeth

Ascension Wisconsin administered its first dose in the state on Wednesday, December 16, 2020, to Dr. Joseph Weber at Ascension SE Wisconsin - Hospital Franklin Campus. Approximately 200 doses were administered to Ascension Wisconsin frontline caregivers on the first day of associate vaccine clinics on Thursday, December 17, 2020.

With the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) having issued emergency use authorization (EUA) for a COVID-19 vaccine, Ascension Wisconsin is implementing a comprehensive vaccine distribution plan that is consistent with federal, state and local guidance.

In accordance with these guidelines, among the first group eligible to receive the vaccines are frontline caregivers – particularly those serving in emergency departments, COVID-19 units and intensive care units. For Ascension Wisconsin, this includes both associates and affiliated physicians and providers. Ascension Wisconsin anticipates the remainder of its associates will be eligible for the vaccine as more doses become available and the distribution process progresses.

Vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna have demonstrated safety and effectiveness, and the FDA has authorized Pfizer's vaccine for emergency use and is expected to do the same for Moderna's vaccine soon.

Earlier this year, Ascension developed a workgroup to establish an overarching framework for equitable allocation of COVID-19 vaccines for internal and external distribution, acknowledging the need for a coordinated response by our ministry that is guided by our mission and informed by our experience of caring for the communities we serve.

As vaccine availability increases, Ascension Wisconsin will implement prioritization recommendations for distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, guided by Ascension's Mission, Vision, Values; Catholic Health Association guidance "Vaccine Equity and Catholic Principles for the Common Good"; guidance from state and federal entities; and available Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance and evidence-based data on disease risk and burden.

"We strongly encourage all our associates to receive a COVID-19 vaccine when it is made available to them," said Bernie Sherry, ministry market executive, Ascension Wisconsin. "In our view, this is the right thing to do to protect our associates and those we are privileged to serve. We are thankful for all who have made this vaccine possible and for the continued dedication of our selfless caregivers."

All approved vaccines require extensive research, documentation and closely monitored clinical trials to determine effectiveness and safety before being submitted by pharmaceutical companies for approval. Ascension has been involved in some of these clinical trials, with Ascension St. Vincent's in Birmingham, Alabama, participating in trials for the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Moderna.

"It's vitally important that people continue to access the healthcare they need, for both emergencies and chronic conditions," said Dr. Greg Brusko, Chief Clinical Officer, Ascension Wisconsin. "By encouraging our caregivers to be vaccinated against COVID-19, we are taking an additional step to assure those we serve that we are doing everything possible to keep our hospitals, clinics and other sites of care safe for them."

Ascension Wisconsin hospitals and emergency rooms remain well prepared to safely care for people with symptoms of a heart attack, stroke, respiratory distress, emergent mental health concerns, or other serious illness or injury.

Many healthcare workers and first responders are receiving the earliest wave of available vaccines, as these professions are exposed to COVID-19 at higher rates. Residents of long-term care facilities and those with high-risk health conditions also are slated to receive vaccines early, per guidelines from the CDC.

When COVID-19 vaccines are available for consumers, Ascension sites of care will share information about the availability of the vaccines through multiple media channels in their communities in 19 states and Washington, D.C.

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About Ascension Wisconsin

In Wisconsin, Ascension operates 24 hospital campuses, more than 100 related healthcare facilities and employs more than 1,200 primary and specialty care clinicians from Racine to Eagle River. Serving Wisconsin since 1848, Ascension is a faith-based healthcare organization committed to delivering compassionate, personalized care to all, with special attention to persons living in poverty and those most vulnerable. Ascension is one of the leading non-profit and Catholic health systems in the U.S., operating 2,600 sites of care – including 146 hospitals and more than 40 senior living facilities – in 19 states and the District of Columbia. Visit www.ascension.org.