

Vaccination Experiences at Vaccine Site in Orange Farm

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When President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that the COVID-19 vaccine would start being rolled out in South Africa, he stated that it would start with 60 years or older people and healthcare workers for Phase 1. Since then, Orange Farm was one of the regions that had a vaccine site designated at the Stretford Community Healthcare Centre. The Community Healthcare Workers who work in the Orange Farm region were also asked to go and assist at the vaccine sites.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, CHWs' daily work was to visit households and render services like registration of household, monitoring the wellbeing of children, adherence support, medication delivery to elderly people and referring cases to different facilities for further assistance. But since COVID-19 started, CHWs have found themselves being overcrowded with work related to COVID-19. Now they have to do COVID-19 screenings and now campaign work at the vaccine sites which includes doing registrations and being queue marshals to ensure that the physical distance and other COVID-19 protocols are maintained.

At first, the vaccination facility at Stretford was unable to operate on its own because the area has five healthcare facilities servicing eight wards. There is a large population in need of healthcare and people have to travel long distances to get to the vaccine site. When they do arrive there are long queues and long waiting time.

The majority of the elderly people in the Orange Farm area were vaccinated with the Pfizer jab. This was a challenge for them because it has two doses which means the elderly have to come back again for the second dose. They wanted lots of questions about the different vaccines, including the difference between Pfizer and Johnson and Johnson.

When the President announced that all the frontline workers should be vaccinated in Phase 2, it became a burden for the Stretford vaccine facility to render its service to all the Orange Farm residents. Though there was supposed to be other centres to assist as vaccination sites, since the other clinics at the area don't have enough space for the vaccine stations then they had to use public places like halls and community multipurpose centres.

Arekopaneng Community Hall is one of the community centres that have been used as the vaccine site. It started by vaccinating teachers for both government and private schools. A person from the Department of Education (DoE) worked with the CHWs in making sure all the teachers were captured on the database of DoE. The majority of teachers have not been vaccinated with the Johnson and Johnson vaccine. Only those who had flu-like symptoms or were pregnant were not vaccinated.

Currently we are at Phase 3 of the vaccination process, which allows 35 years or older people to vaccinate. We have found many people are ready and willing for their vaccination while many others have said that they have been sent by their employers to vaccinate. Though it is illegal for employers to force their employees to get the COVID-19 jab, many people have asked for proof of vaccination, stating that since they did not want to lose their job they had decided to come and get their vaccine doses.

The other challenges at the vaccine site include that sometimes there is a shortage of registration papers and sometimes the vaccine have finished (run out). When this happens, the patient has to wait for forms or vaccines to be collected from Stredford Clinic. Sometimes patients are asked to rather come back the following day.

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