

Dr. Marjorie Bessel Press Conference 8/25

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Good afternoon.

Today my opening remarks will not focus heavily on capacity data, but rather what this volume means for our health care system as a whole and for those seeking care – both COVID and non-COVID.

As I have mentioned in recent weeks, we continue to see an increase in COVID patients as well as an unseasonably high volume of non-COVID patients. We are seeing this across all our markets, and at this time it is very difficult to predict when this surge will subside.

The high number of non-COVID patients in our hospitals and ICUs is due, in part, to the fact that many delayed care over the past 17 months because of the pandemic, and they are now seeking care for illnesses and medical issues that have become more severe.

You might recall my remarks several months ago during the winter COVID surge when I discussed the future impact that delay of care can have on patients and hospitals. This is that impact – what we are seeing in our hospitals today – and it is one that has us concerned.

We are treating patients with advanced heart issues, late-stage cancer and injuries that require more extensive surgical and procedural care to correct. We are caring for these individuals in addition to COVID patients, who currently account for about 25% of our total patient population. That might not seem like a lot to you, but please remember that these COVID patients require much more attention and care. It is also very rare at any time for a quarter of patients to be hospitalized for a single diagnosis. And, many of those hospitalizations could have been prevented had the patients chosen to receive the vaccine.

Vaccination is our way out of this pandemic. It will allow the United States' health care system to free up capacity in its hospitals that is currently occupied by

unvaccinated COVID patients. It will also allow us to shift our focus to those patients in need of preventive care and treatment for non-COVID conditions.

Alternatively, if we do not improve our vaccination rates, and unvaccinated COVID patients continue to occupy a significant amount of space in our hospitals, there may come a time when that space is not available for patients with other emergent health care needs. COVID really does impact all of us – either directly or indirectly – and the medical care that we have become accustomed to here in the United States.

Before I close out, I do want to provide you with a bit of information and data that is not readily available on state dashboards. This data relates to hospitalized COVID patients who are unvaccinated as well as pediatric COVID admissions in Arizona.

Pediatric COVID admissions at Banner continue to grow in the Arizona market at the same rate as the first two weeks of August. These patients still account for roughly 5% of our hospitalized COVID patients. ICU admissions and ventilator usage for this age group remain low.

We do not yet have a Banner system rollup for COVID patient vaccination rates. We are working to develop this report systemwide. That said, for the states that we do have this data for – which includes Arizona – it continues to yield a very high percentage of unvaccinated patients – around 93 to 94%.

The COVID vaccines are doing a remarkable job at preventing serious illness and death. If our communities were vaccinated at higher rates, I would not be at today's press conference.

We all received good news this week when the FDA fully approved the Pfizer COVID vaccine. Many of you have said that this is what was needed to change your mind and get vaccinated. I hope this approval will prove to you that the vaccines are safe and effective. Top scientists and clinical experts have spent a great deal of time developing these vaccines and ensuring that they are safe. Please trust those subject matter experts rather than relying on obscure information that you find online or receive from others who are less informed about the vaccines and process.

I hope all of you will choose to get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect yourself and others as well as reduce the undue stress that it has placed on our health systems for over a year. Your family members, colleagues, neighbors and those who you do not know but are out there breathing the same air as you may need us for non-COVID care. If you are unvaccinated, right now – and I literally mean right now – is the day to do your part.

Thank you.