

## **Testimony for a joint meeting between House Health Care and Senate Health and Welfare Committees on Wednesday, 4.22.20**

### **How are you providing care to your patients during the pandemic?**

Facing the stark realities of the Corona virus, and with the advice of our medical director, we have canceled our in-person clinics and have temporarily pivoted to more of a referral clinic model like some of the other free clinics in Vermont. That said, please be assured that through cancellation of appointments, social media and other communications, our staff has been telling our farmworkers (and our Vermonter patients) that we are still here to take care of them and we continue to encourage them to call when sick or with questions/concerns.

Our two registered nurses are fielding all clinical calls, triaging patients, conferring with our volunteer medical director, Linn Larson, MD, and doing a comprehensive job of addressing each patient's concern right through their course of treatment and follow-up care as appropriate. Dr. Larson is providing immeasurable guidance and direction, and has availed herself for daily phone consults, telemedicine visits when needed, and is helping triage all suspected Covid cases with our nurses. Two of our volunteer physicians, Chris Grace, MD and Terry Naumann, MD are standing ready to provide back-up to Linn as more resources are needed to help our patients.

Our outreach nurse and board chair/volunteer nurse have begun a comprehensive outreach effort targeting 57 farms throughout Addison County. We have prepared "Covid Bags" to distribute to each farm. These contain two hand-sewn masks for each worker, hand sanitizer, soap, thermometers, ibuprofen, and colorful patient education flyers, in Spanish, from the CDC. To date we have visited over 40 farms and before each visit, our nurse calls each farm owner to ask if he/she would like a bag. She then makes arrangements for a safe drop-off to the farm. Farmers have been very receptive to this effort and grateful for the supplies, information and support provided by our clinic.

Last month, Senator Ruth Hardy reached out to us and asked the following questions which our outreach nurse addressed as follows:

**Would ODC be able to support farmworkers through self-isolation?** We would be able to provide routine check-ins with the patient (through WhatsApp, phone or their preferred method of communication) as well as consult with them on self-care measures and when or if to seek further care. If the patient had further needs (around food access, lack of income, etc.) we would be able to either refer them to our community partners (like Addison Allies or Migrant Justice) or use some of our connections to get them assistance (through local mini-grants, etc.)

**Have you heard about anyone who is continuing to work on a farm while exhibiting symptoms?** No. I have triaged several calls from patients with headaches or coughs but they did not meet criteria for concern. They all continued to work. The one with the cough wore a mask but did not have any other troubling symptoms.

**And, if someone has to stop work due to COVID, what types of financial supports can they access? Are farmers continuing to pay?** Those are good questions. In Addison County, 19.2% of dairy farms are supported by Agri-Placement Services, a dairy farm staffing company that places workers with farms, provides bilingual communication, and advocates for workers' needs. While they don't ensure that their farms provide paid sick leave, they do recommend it to them and help support workers who need it. They have also provided COVID-19 health information (in conjunction with ODC) to all their farm owners and workers. I would imagine there are many factors that would go into this decision for the farmers, based primarily on how big their farm is, how well they are doing financially, and what type of person the farmer is. We've seen farmers pay their workers' wages through an illness and others who have fired them when they had to miss extended days.