

I have the honor and privilege to serve as the CEO at Troy Regional Medical Center. When I arrived, Jan 6, 2020, I only had about 60 days before the Covid -19 pandemic became global and forever changed our lives. The team at Troy Regional did an exceptional job in 2020 navigating a healthcare landscape never seen before in the modern era. And now, in the summer of 2021, we are right back in a similar or worse situation. I have written this column weekly for nearly 18 months, trying to keep the community updated on the real status of this deadly virus, so here is my latest update.

The reality of things today is bleak.

When you hear on the news that hospitals are full, ventilators are hard to come by, staff is stretched, and patients are getting younger and younger, IT'S TRUE. I'm living it.

When you hear that the last thing patients ask for prior to being intubated is the vaccine, IT'S TRUE. I'm living it.

When you hear that the vast majority of patients are unvaccinated and a significant number of hospitals are on diversion, IT'S TRUE. I'm living it.

I can tell you that my team and I are exhausted from seeing so many people suffer and know the vast majority were preventable. And unlike the past surges we have seen over the past 18 months, this time it is not the older population that is being affected. Troy Regional is approaching capacity in our ICU and our Emergency Department is seeing higher than normal volumes, and the large majority are young adults. We are adding additional resources for negative pressure rooms and acquiring additional ventilators to keep patients alive. We must take action to increase our level of vaccinations in our community, in our county and in our State. Alabama still lags behind every state in the nation in vaccination rates and Pike County is close to the bottom in the state.

A final thought for consideration: If you were going to go out on a boat and there was a possibility of a storm, how would you prepare and protect yourself? Do you think to yourself "I'm a good swimmer, I'll be fine," and not bother with anything else? Or would you consider bringing a life vest? But what if you also had the chance to have a life raft just in case you ran into the storm? Wouldn't you want that as well? Think of the person who considers himself a good swimmer like the person who thinks they are healthy and will be perfectly fine if they become infected with Covid and think of the life vests like hand hygiene and masks. But for those of us who are eligible to get the vaccine, that is like having your own life raft. Upon entering the storm, why not be as ready as possible? I am telling you; we are in the storm. Social media is rampant with myths of the vaccine causing horrible things. If you have questions, speak with your local healthcare provider, and get the facts.

I'm asking my family, friends, neighbors, and community to please get vaccinated. And if you've already done so, I say Thank You. If you need a vaccine, Troy Regional is offering vaccine clinics on Friday's from 1pm -4pm and we are happy to help.

Spread the word, not the virus.

Rick E. Smith, FACHE
Chief Executive Officer
Troy Regional Medical Center