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Strategic SARS-CoV-2 Testing for Risk Mitigation and Optimal Healthcare Workers and Patients



Picture (from left to right): Marcus Bauer, Matthias Orth, Sr. Karin Johanna, Stefan Reineck

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered substantial changes in the way we live, the way society works and of course, in our healthcare systems. It is common in all geographical areas that the fight against the virus remains. The need to track, trace and quarantine infected individuals to minimize transmission and maximize health is imperative. Protective measures are especially important in hospitals where risk of transmission is high, and potentially lethal to patients and workers alike.

With this understanding, an integrated clinical care team at Marienhospital in Germany, rapidly developed

and implemented new policies and procedures to maximize the health and safety of their patients and healthcare workers (HCWs) during the early stages of the pandemic.

Rapid polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing was initiated in all patients and HCWs at strategic intervals in accordance with strict, custom protocols across all wards. Multiple real-time PCR (RT-PCR) test methods were used in parallel, mitigating supply dependences and enabling timely confirmation of indeterminate samples. Especially, all inpatients were tested on admission, with high-risk patient tested one day prior to admission and precautionarily quarantined until test results were available, and low-risk patients tested on the day of admission with standard safety precautions (i.e., face mask, distancing). High-risk healthcare workers (i.e., those working on COVID-19 wards) were tested weekly, while low-risk HCWs and outpatients with risk of transmission (i.e., dental patients, gastroscopy) were tested every 4 weeks.

These proactive and protective measures have had a significant impact on the safety of patients and healthcare workers. Impressively, no HCWs in regular contact with infected COVID-19 patients were tested "positive" for COVID-19. Moreover, asymptomatic patients (and HCWs from other wards) have been identified through protective screening measures, enabling quarantine and tracing measures to reduce transmission. Hospital capacity during the initial phase of the pandemic was reduced to approximately 40%, with no elective procedures, and treatment of COVID-19 patients were under strict protective conditions. Since implementation of these protective measures and as the community healed, hospital capacity resumed to 95%. As the virus is still at large, care teams at Marienhospital continue to work together to mitigate risk and maximize the well-being of patients and staff.

For their strategic protective measures to protect the health of both patients and healthcare workers, this

integrated clinical care team was recognized with a 2020 UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence award for Achievement. Congratulations to the leaders of this initiative Matthias Orth, *MD*, *PhD*, *Head of Institute for Laboratory Medicine*, Markus Bauer, *MD*, *Head of Department of Occupational health and Safety*, Sr. Karin Johanna, Haase, *Pharmacist, Head of the Hospital Pharmacy*, Stefan Reinecke, *MD*, *Head of Department of Internal Medicine*.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1. Protective measures of tracking, tracing and quarantining individuals with COVID-19 is essential during the fight of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2. To have effective protective measures, proactive identification of symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals is crucial.
- 3. Implementation of laboratory-led strategic testing to maximize identification of infections is key success factor in this pandemic.

For more details on this best practice and/or other best practices that received recognition by the UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence Award program, please visit **www.UnivantsHCE.com**.