

Letter to the Editor March 17, 2020

Testing, testing, 123

As of last Friday, all nursing homes nationwide received guidance from CMS to halt visitations, and start monitoring residents and staff for the Covid-19 illness. This was at least a week late of what should have happened, based on national and international trends.

I personally expected that locally we would be ahead of this. I would have expected the County Health Department to personally reach out to each of the dozen or so senior facilities in the county to provide guidance and as importantly, some assurance. Many of these front line workers are the susceptible elderly themselves, or have young children to be concerned about. It can be a very lonely place for those on the front lines of dealing with this.

We need County leadership to step up. We cannot get ahead of this if we are always behind it.

In my view, we need locally produced test kits and laboratories for testing to get ahead of this. Testing is limited right now to about 150 per day for the entire state of Wisconsin. There is currently no recommendation from the Federal government for surveillance testing in any population. Yet, experts continue to say that testing is the key to flatten the exponential rise of the curve of infection.

There are about 25,000 of Residents in Certified Nursing Facilities in Wisconsin. There are 500 plus skilled care beds in Manitowoc County, excluding Assisted Living and Senior Housing facilities.

We know what happens when things go wrong. In one Washington State nursing home, 22 are dead, and 47 staff (one third) infected.

Info from the Federal politicians is conflicting and often erroneous, and I fear that the CDC and other experts are being muzzled. The Feds are now saying to not expect their help.

We need to support those on the front lines of this. Right now, this is those who lead and work at eldercare facilities. Soon it will be first responders and healthcare workers.

Federal leadership is a joke, state leadership is questionable, so local leadership is key.
Time to step-up!