

Please Try Your Call Again Later

Category: The Vaccine

written by Thomas Quattlebaum | January 17, 2021

“All of our service representatives are busy. Please try your call again later.”

On the first day that our local health system allowed medical staff to call in to schedule vaccine appointments, the demand quickly overwhelmed the phone lines. The plan was to open up scheduling by phone starting at 8:00 a.m., and I called as soon I could, only to be greeted by the message above after a few rings. I continued calling the rest of that morning, and eventually the line didn't even ring before going straight to the recording. We later learned that the call center received over 5,000 calls in the first hour—no wonder I couldn't get through!

It felt agonizing to be so close to getting vaccinated only to be thwarted by a lack of call center staff. Eventually, though, persistence paid off and I finally got through to schedule an appointment the following day. I heard from colleagues that they had also successfully made appointments, and we exchanged virtual high-fives. When I arrived at the scheduled time, I encountered a waiting line with more people gathered in one place than I had seen for over nine months. The excitement was palpable.

Waiting truly was the hardest part. When my turn came, I hardly registered receiving the vaccine, though I will always remember the sense of hope and relief I felt afterward. Shortly after getting my injection, I ran into a colleague holding a handmade sign made by her kids, saying their mom was getting vaccinated for them. She said she cried when they presented it to her. I took her photo while she held this sign, which reminded us all of what this moment represents in the fight against COVID-19: the chance to protect our loved ones and the most vulnerable in our society.

Despite my initial frustration, I cannot commend our hospital enough for putting together the vaccine system as smoothly as they did. An online scheduling system was quickly implemented, and all staff who wanted a vaccine were soon scheduled. It feels unreal that almost a year has passed since the first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in the U.S., but being one step closer to neutralizing this pandemic—that is definitely something worth waiting for.

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