



Antigen Testing—Cheaper, Faster, Still Complicated

A small machine – about the size of an adding machine – has the potential to change how VHRC tests for COVID. The BD Veritor Antigen Testing Machine performs rapid COVID detection tests. VHRC and other nursing homes in "hot spots" received this machine from Health and Human Services a few weeks ago.

The antigen testing machine has been helpful in a number of ways to VHRC. The antigen test is cheaper than the PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests. A COVID test using the antigen machine is about \$35 versus a PCR test, which is about \$100. Multiply that price by the 248 weekly tests – all ABP staff tested twice as mandated by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) – and you have an idea of the costs being incurred by VHRC not only in keeping our residents safe, but also in abiding by CMS requirements. The antigen test is also much less invasive, still requiring a nasal swab, but not as deep as the nasopharyngeal swab. Finally, the antigen test is fast, giving results in just 15 minutes.

The antigen test is not as sensitive as the PCR. However, VHRC's clinical team said the antigen tests are very helpful in detecting asymptomatic cases. And if the antigen machine alerted them to a positive case, they would retest with the PCR test, which is more accurate.



Lisa Desmond, Director of Clinical Operations, (left) and Theresa Morgan, Director of Nursing, demonstrate how the antigen testing machine works.

Unfortunately, the machine is now sitting idle, since VHRC, and the medical distributors VHRC relies on, do not have the assay material needed to conduct the antigen tests. Much like at the beginning of the pandemic when PPE was difficult to find, now assay material is scarce. ABP staff are once again being tested with PCR tests. Luckily, due to the decreased positivity rate in the surrounding community – the rate upon which the CMS requirements are based – ABP staff are now only being tested monthly.

Lisa Desmond, Director of Clinical Operations, said this challenge is typical of other issues faced during the pandemic. "It is challenging to be on-point when we are still learning about the virus while at the same time having to deal with supply issues." Nonetheless, Lisa continued, "our clinical team has done an excellent job keeping our residents safe."

A Seafarer's Story

When you grow up on a cotton farm, the hard work starts at a young age. "I first picked cotton when I was six years old; my mother made my twin brother and me cotton sacks, and we worked in the fields every day," says Jay Arnold, who was raised on a 320-acre Mississippi cotton farm with six siblings in the depths of the Depression. "At about eight years old, I was chopping cotton with a hoe, and driving a cultivator by about 10. I had the fastest team of mules on the farm!" By the time he was a senior in high school, Jay and two brothers were farming their own 50 acres, which produced 100 bales of cotton. "We stayed home from school two days a week to pick and did the homework at night," says Jay, who still graduated as class valedictorian.

Then the Navy changed his life. After graduating from Old Miss in the Navy ROTC program, Jay spent the next three years on a destroyer sailing around the world, including to Korea at the tail end of the Korean War. After active duty, he considered returning to farming but then met his wife, Anne, at a party. "I decided right away, that's the one for me. I knew that Anne would never make a farmer's wife. But she made one heck of a Navy wife!"

During Jay's 30-year career in the Navy as a captain, he commanded three ships, including destroyers and ocean mine sweepers home ported in Long Beach, Pearl Harbor, and Japan. In the Viet Nam War, he received a service medal with five campaign stars. "The best job in the world is commanding officer of a Navy ship at



Jay Arnold and his legacy brick, honoring six Arnold family Navy officers, whose active service totals 103 years.

sea," says Jay, who acknowledges that he came a long way from the cotton farm. "I'll tell you, cotton farming was hard work but it was interesting too – and it paid off for me in the long run."

The Campus Voice

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