

Improved COVID-19 Testing at Wayne Memorial Hospital

(Honesdale, Pa, April 13, 2020) ... “The quality of our tests is excellent,” said Sibyl Rickard, MD, chief pathologist at Wayne Memorial Hospital. She noted that early on, COVID tests were much less accurate, but today “the sensitivity of the assay is 99%, meaning only one in 100 might be inconclusive. Ninety-nine are conclusive.”

Not everyone can be tested yet, however. There is still a shortage of testing materials such as the viral transport media and the type of swabs used to collect specimens.

“The criteria for testing remains strict,” Dr. Rickard explained, “because of the limited number of testing kits.”

Tests are prioritized for those who need them the most: hospitalized patients, potentially exposed healthcare workers and certain people with symptoms. “It is critical to test our hospitalized or admitted patients,” said James Pettinato, RN, director WMH Patient Care services, “so their treatment is not only appropriate for them but also to limit exposure to other patients in the hospital.”

The hospital has tested between 300 and 400 individuals since early March. A handful have been called back to re-test, mostly because the quantity of the specific cells needed from the patient when swabbed was insufficient. “Sometimes this is due to excess secretions hindering a successful extraction,” said Dr. Rickard. “It is not because the test itself is faulty.”

Wayne Memorial currently uses three labs for testing, including its own laboratory in the hospital, the commercial company, Lab Corp, and the state health department laboratory near Philadelphia.

Laboratory Services Manager John Romano said that in addition to improved testing accuracy, results are coming back faster than they were when testing started.

“A patient still needs a prescription from his or her healthcare provider for a test,” said Romano, “but once we have that in hand, we can turn around the results fairly quickly.” For example, he said, Lab Corp results are now coming back in about three days, compared to five-to-seven days just a week ago.

For more information, visit wmh.org/covid-19-novel-coronavirus or cdc.gov/coronavirus.