

## **BROADCAST- COVID-19 treatment improves, but prevention through vaccination is key to recovery**

COVID-19 has become the most deadly pandemic in American history, with deaths at more than 650,000, surpassing the estimated deaths from the 1918 Spanish flu. But a lead infectious disease doctor for Peoria, Illinois-based OSF HealthCare says over the course of the pandemic, medical providers have found ways to save lives with improved, more standardized care.

Doug Kasper, M.D., a leader in the OSF HealthCare response to COVID-19, says unlike the early days in the pandemic, all providers now know the best protocols for treatment and how to make sure those infected are getting the proper care.

Dr. Kasper says research and experience has led to earlier intervention and improved treatment.

**“We’re better at lab-based monitoring to assess ongoing infection and damage, and we’re better at recognizing those individuals that require hospitalizations for specialized care. That has come a tremendously long way since earlier on in the pandemic, where it was more of a case-by-case basis. We’ve now progressed to having a systemic understanding of COVID-19 treatment.” (:25)**

One improvement has been the early use of monoclonal antibodies for people who are at high risk of serious complications. Dr. Kasper says the infusions are a preventive measure that help stop the virus from replicating.

**“We give it outside of the hospital to prevent admission to the hospital. It can be used in individuals who are vaccinated or unvaccinated. It is being used across the country widely at this time.” (:14)**

Other COVID-19 therapies include steroids and anti-inflammatory drugs, along with oxygen therapy and anticoagulants to prevent blood clots.

Convalescent plasma from recovered COVID-19 patients was used early on but Dr. Kasper says it is no longer a preferred therapy, based on research from a large clinical trial in which OSF HealthCare participated.

**“Clinical trial data did not support its effective use and the emergence of monoclonal antibody and vaccination replaced it as much more successful strategies for COVID-19 infection.” (:13)**

Proning – putting individuals with COVID-19 on their stomachs as a way to increase the amount of oxygen to the lungs is being used, in many cases, to keep patients off of a ventilator.

**“The idea is that proning is not harmful to the individual in any way and is potentially helpful for oxygenation response.” (:07)**

Patients are also given a cocktail of vitamins to help boost the immune system even though research isn’t there to support the approach. Dr. Kasper says it can help but certainly won’t hurt.

The COVID-19 infection has two phases – one in which the virus attacks cells and the second in which an individual’s own immune response, while trying to clear the infection, can lead to tissue damage.

**This is where we start to see people that have trouble with respiratory symptoms. The ongoing cycle of infection and inflammation in the lungs leads to viral pneumonia, which in some individuals can be quite severe, leading to respiratory failure.” (:18)**

Patients who experience long COVID symptoms such as fatigue, reduced endurance and brain fog are receiving support through primary care doctors, e-consults, and outpatient therapy.

The pandemic has also led to the expansion of support for nursing facilities and group homes, and expanding at-home monitoring and care.

**“There are whole new types of care, a lot of which has been developed around telemedicine, e-Medicine, that are trying to provide outreach to all impacts of the pandemic, not only in Peoria, not only in our bigger cities, but into our rural patient populations as well.” (:20)**

No matter how far treatment has come since the start of the pandemic, Dr. Kasper says the best approach moving forward is the prevention that comes with being fully vaccinated against the virus.