

Rumbling Along to Bring Hope and Relief



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Anyone who saw the convoy of an impressive looking big, bright blue trailer, one SUV, two MPVs, one 5 tonne lorry, one passenger bus and one clinic bus rumbling merrily along the highways, would have stared... and perhaps wondered.

And when they drove through the roads of the smaller towns and rural areas to their destination this was all the more a sight to behold.

This was the IJN team heading to the outskirts of Malaysian towns, bringing the COVID-19 vaccination to the people there. **Prof Dato Dr Mohamed Ezani Md Taib**, Head & Director of Operations, Private Health Care Division who led the team, explains that IJN mooted the idea of mobile vaccination in June when the country saw a spike in COVID infections.

So a task force was formed, a lot of meetings and discussions held, and it took a lot of co-ordination, approvals, and registration with various parties such as the CITE, MOH, MKN, the police, local community leaders and state health departments, among many others.

An official operational guideline was created - based on our submitted proposal - and we were ready to go, and trust me, it was not as simple as it sounds. However, although it required much planning and co-ordination, it all came together quite quickly.

Anyway, as IJN had been administering COVID-19 vaccinations since 1 March, we had the know-how and easily transferred this to the mobile programme, albeit with a long list of additional and detailed specifications, requirements, SOPs and guidelines.

We trained a core group of doctors, nurses, pharmacists and non-medical staff to handle the administration, data collection and other support services. Every single step was planned down to a tee, especially the supply of the vaccines and the stringent cold chain management. Most importantly, we had to secure the CITF licenses to vaccinate as a mobile unit for each location.

And so we took off to our first destination, Bukit Kepong in Muar, on 19 June 2021.

Each mobile project was a 4-day trip comprising 35 - 40 staff. We would head off on Thursday evening and upon arrival, a group of us would scout the location and ensure everything was as per our requirements. We needed chairs, tables and cordoned off areas for sick bay and the resuscitation area. We also had to check that the crowd flow system was in order with demarcation tape all properly aligned to maintain SOPs.

Then the technical team set up the electrical systems, and laptops, liaising with TNB to draw electricity from the power stations to feed our trailer and buses. We did not want to rely on portable generators which emit fumes and have limited charge.

Sometimes we had to stay till midnight getting everything ready so as to be up and running bright and early the next day. Except for the vaccines, IJN covered the cost of everything else.

On Friday, our vaccines would arrive by 8:00am - either collected by us or delivered by the health authorities. We vaccinated between 600 - 800 people a day, according to line list we received, including high-risk cases. This was because we brought a mobile ICU in our trailer, with medical and oxygen supplies and trained personnel to manage any emergency reaction as the hospitals were quite far away. So no one was turned away.

Our standard of care at each site was quite simply, excellent. RELA and local NGO's helped with the external bubble of crowd control and registration while we had complete jurisdiction in the internal bubble.

We even went to the extent that every piece of wire was plastered with the black and yellow tape. And every vaccinee was given a band at registration, identifying them as either "cleared for vaccine", "fall risk" or "potential reaction" persons, so that our staff were on the alert.

All in, we administered some 15,000 doses of both Pfizer and Sinovac vaccines, fully vaccinating 15,502 people in 7 locations across 3 states.

I am very proud of the team who planned and executed IJN's mobile vaccination programme. It was executed very well, with attention to the minutest of details and the highest standard of care maintained throughout, even in difficult situations.

IJN is recognised not only by Clinical Management of COVID-19 Patient, we also have Joint Commission International (JCI) accreditation which places our standard of care as equivalent to the high standards of American hospitals. So wherever we provide any health care or service, everything is up to these strict standards.

That is why when we were audited, we passed with flying colours each time. For example, MOH audited our process flow, CITF and Protect Health inspected SOP adherence and cold chain management, among other areas, while the police came to check on safety issues.

The auditors were especially impressed with our mobile ICU, and looking back, I too am impressed by our whole set up!

IJN is a Level 4 sub-specialised tertiary referral centre, and vaccinations at ground level is actually primary work. So, it was a very different experience for us, but I have to say it was very humbling, especially when we saw the response and the gratitude in the faces of the people. It showed that someone cared for them, as remote as they were, and we were privileged to be able to help them.

These are unusual times and unprecedented situations and it is only right that we come together to support and help people wherever and whenever we can, both as organisations as well as individuals.

Yes, there were many challenges and various inconveniences. And bear in mind, we were going from a highly-controlled high tech hospital in a big city, to rural areas. Many things were out of our control, for example, there was once we had no water, and you can guess that other conveniences we take for granted were also lacking.

But the team was wholly committed to the mission and we took it in stride. It was wonderful to see everyone working together, supporting each other and finding solutions to make sure that things progressed as smoothly as possible.

We are happy to have been part of this programme and to have contributed to this all important outreach of vaccinating our people.