Example Strategy for Improving Respiratory Disease Specimen Submissions from Louisiana

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Beginning in mid-June 2023 I began to assemble a number of data bases; a list of urgent care clinics from the internet, StarLIMS active submitters, list of colleges and universities provided by the Public Information Officer, Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance and a licensed provide report from the State of Louisiana Health Standards website. These databases provided contact information for use in a cold calling campaign.

Every entity was called, the responsible party was identified and email addresses were obtained. Beginning with urgent care clinics, details as to the type of respiratory testing was collected and instructions for use were researched with the intent to customize a marketing email requesting participation in statewide respiratory surveillance. This strategy was later abandoned in favor of a single comprehensive marketing strategy.

A document titled “Two Swab Tuesday”, copy attached for reference was used in initial follow up emails. Also attached were copies of a Submitter Information Update/Secure Fax Form, Request for User Access to the Lab Web Portal (LWP) Form and a link to a Specimen Shipping Container and Supply Order Form, copies attached for reference.

The document’s premise mirrored the unscripted cold calls, introducing the Department of Public Health Laboratory “Two Swab Tuesday” statewide respiratory surveillance program. Program participants are asked to collect two sample swabs from each patient on Tuesdays (or day of choice) for respiratory illness testing. The State Lab provides swabs, viral transport media (VTM), packaging and courier services. The “ask” from the partner is to take a second swab, log into our Lab Web Portal (LWP), enter basic demographics, schedule a pick up date, label the tube and freeze or refrigerate the specimen pending courier pick up.

The majority of partners required multiple weekly follow up calls and emails to secure participation or declination. This effort continued through mid-November 2023 and resulted in thirty six partners agreeing to provide samples. The majority of Urgent Care Clinics declined, citing the time and expense of logging in the orders and processing the samples. The majority of other potential partners who declined cited staffing shortages as the primary reason to decline participation.

As of mid-November 2023 multiple serial cold call and email attempts to secure participation have exhausted cold call lists and a listing of retired partners is being sorted and organized for another cold calling effort. Another round of cold calling is planned for the first quarter of 2024. Staffing issues may have stabilized and the increase in seasonal respiratory diseases may impress on the minds of potential partners of the value and necessity of a robust statewide respiratory disease surveillance program.

A series of in person meetings for larger submitters and Zoom meetings for smaller submitters are planned to thank and encourage ongoing participation of existing submitters.

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