

ON AIR

Todd Herman

Rantz: UW Medicine pulls heart transplant patient from list after refusing COVID vaccine

BY JASON RANTZ
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The Jason Rantz Show on KTTH has learned that UW Medicine removed 64-year-old Frank Sam Allen patient from the transplant waiting list. This is a photo from Allen's previous surgery in 2014. (Photo: Frank Sam Allen)



officials refuse to answer basic questions about their policy.

In fact, they won't even directly acknowledge they have a policy.

The Jason Rantz Show on KTTH has learned that UW Medicine removed a 64-year-old patient from the transplant waitlist. He says he was on the list for two and a half years. The hospital made the decision after they learned the patient refused to be vaccinated against COVID. They said they would consider adding him back to the waitlist should he satisfy their "compliance concerns."

Last week, one vaccine-hesitant patient came forward. He says he was told the vaccine was mandatory before he could get a necessary liver transplant. The hospital does not deny any of the allegations.

Transplant patients denied organs over COVID vaccine



Rantz: UW Medicine patient forced into unwanted COVID vaccine to get his liver transplant

UW Medicine denies a patient a heart



ine over not getting the COVID vaccine.

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In June, Sam Allen of Monroe learned that his heart transplant surgery was on the line over his refusal to get the COVID vaccine.

The list of medical conditions Allen says he's facing is long: mitral valve regurgitation, tricuspid valve regurgitation, aortic valve regurgitation, aneurism of thoracic aorta, and dilated cardiomyopathy.

He says three leaky heart valves impact the blood pumping into his lungs. Allen says it makes it difficult to breathe, which played a role in why he wouldn't wear a mask. He previously underwent open-heart surgery, and he says his heart was damaged in the process.

After a disagreement over mask use, Allen says his doctor called him.

"The cardiologist called me and we had a discussion, and he informed me that, 'well, you're going to have to get a vaccination to get a transplant.' And I said, 'well that's news to me. And nobody's ever told me that before.' And he says, 'yeah, that's our policy,'" Allen recalled.

Allen said he told the doctor he would not get vaccinated.

A few days later, Allen said he received a letter dated June 7, 2021. It informed him that he was pulled from the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) waiting list for a heart.

"Your name has been removed from the waitlist at the University of Washington Medical Center. This was done in follow-up to your recent conversation with providers regarding the heart transplant selection committee's concerns about compliance with COVID-19-related policies and recommendations," the letter reads. "We can re-assess you for reinstatement on the waiting list should the

It was signed by UW Medicine and the Cardiac Transplant/Advanced Heart Failure Therapies Selection Committee.

UW Medicine ignored Allen's concerns

Allen says he wrote a letter to UW Medicine to express his disappointment with the decision. He shared the letter with the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH.

"I understand that my choices have repercussions but I did not change the policy. I am most put off, not by your decision to remove me from the list, thereby removing any opportunity to live out my life at a near-normal level, but by the lack of scientific logic that dictates your 'policy,'" he wrote.

He points to the [side effects](#) associated with the vaccine as why he did not want to get it.

"As a person who has spent much time and money at UWMC as a heart failure patient, I am being told I cannot get care for my condition unless I take an injection that has shown to cause cardiac problems," he wrote. "It seems that a wise choice would be to not make a panic move and run to get injected with the experimental gene therapy until more is known."

On Aug. 10, Allen received a response.

Bo Secord, assistant director of patient relations, said they received his letter and that it was shared with "appropriate leadership." But they weren't budging.

"As your provider noted, they are happy to re-evaluate should you change your mind," Secord wrote.

[Rantz: Healthy teen sent to ER after Pfizer vaccine, CDC investigates heart issues](#)

UW Medicine repeatedly deflects questions, doesn't deny claims

transplant list, hospital spokesperson Susan Gregg said they merely “recommend that all solid-organ transplant candidates be vaccinated against COVID-19.” This was not true in the specific case.

After follow-up questions, Gregg shifted her position.

“Our physicians make a determination regarding vaccine recommendations and requirements, including COVID-19 vaccination, based on the risk factors of the individual patient and degree of immunosuppression they will experience,” she wrote.

But after emails from several patients with the same story of being denied or threatened with denial of treatment over COVID vaccine refusal, it seemed likely there was a policy.

I asked a series of specific questions to Gregg and Lisa Brandenburg, president of [UW Medicine Hospitals & Clinics](#).

Is there a written or unwritten policy that will deny transplants to patients based on their COVID status? Will UW Medicine provide transplant operations to unvaccinated patients? When are patients told about the vaccine requirement from their doctor — if it is not, in fact, a written policy? And has UW Medicine conducted any transplants on patients who have NOT been vaccinated? How many have been denied, placed on a status 7, or taken off waitlists for transplants?

Brandenburg did not respond to multiple emails.

Gregg refused to answer any of the questions directly, offering a rote statement reiterating that the hospital’s top priority is to treat transplant patients as best as they can. Apparently, their commitment only applies to the patients who will receive a vaccine.

Why is UW Medicine evasive?

Gregg indicated that if a doctor makes a treatment a requirement, then a patient must follow it.

based on the risk factors of the individual patient and degree of immunosuppression they will experience,” Gregg told the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH.

But if UW Medicine never provides transplant surgery for patients who refuse the COVID vaccine, isn't that effectively a policy? Under what conditions would UW Medicine *not* require a COVID vaccine? And when patients flatly deny a willingness to get the vaccine and the response from UW Medicine is to deny them treatment, how is that working with the patient?

It's bizarre that the hospital isn't being clear. It's also incredibly suspicious.

Rantz: Seattle Children's won't provide data to back up COVID-child claims

What happened to do no harm?

Perhaps the lack of clarity is due to the medical ethics of withholding potentially life-saving surgery from patients expressing some level of bodily and medical autonomy?

Maybe it's unwise to establish a policy on a vaccine that hasn't yet been given full approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Are there legal ramifications for that?

Or it could be that not even all UW Medicine staff were willing to receive the vaccine. In fact, the hospital had to mandate staff receive the vaccine, as they did not choose to get it on their own. Could you defend a mandate for patients when your staff wasn't fully compliant?

My assumption is that the doctors impose this mandate for the overall health of their patients. I don't think there are ulterior motives, nor do I think they view the risks of vaccine side effects as high. I believe they're doing what they think is right. One can obviously make a medical argument that the vaccine is the smart move in this case.

But it's wrong to deny potentially life-saving health care to patients when their decision on a vaccine does not impact the procedure. When a doctor instructs

A pre-surgery vaccine for an unrelated issue does not impact a surgery either way, even if it's not as risky as a patient thinks or if it conflicts with what the doctor would personally do under the same circumstances.

It should be up to the patient

The doctor shouldn't dictate every decision of a patient. Instead, they should make good-faith efforts to educate a patient on a course of action. It's also disturbing to apply this policy to someone on the transplant list before COVID existed. How is that ethical?

Ultimately, however, it's up to the patient, not the doctor.

Doctors give much more leeway to drug addicts seeking treatment for an infection due to intravenous drug use than they do to a patient in need of a heart transplant. Do the doctors deny an addict treatment until the addict goes into detox? Of course not.

It's also worth noting that the University of Washington – Harborview Medical Center hosts the Harm Reduction Research and Treatment Center in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. It gives out [tips](#) to addicts on how to get high using a “harm reduction” model. But no vaccine shot, no heart or liver?

In this case, UW Medicine is letting Allen down. And they won't be clear about what their policy actually is. That means future patients who do not want the vaccine would waste their time seeking treatment at UW Medicine. Shouldn't they know the policy ahead of time?

For Allen, it's leading to a sober reality for life if he doesn't get the heart transplant: It may end.

“It absolutely will lead to my death,” he said.

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