

## **Every Vote Counts: Two Hospitals Empower Patients to Vote While Admitted**

Shane Solger, MD

As physicians, we see firsthand how hospitalizations can disrupt lives, but one aspect often overlooked is how it can interfere with a patient's ability to vote. At my two Brooklyn hospitals, we have implemented a plan to ensure that our patients can participate in local, state, and federal elections—even while admitted.

This initiative was inspired by VotER, a national organization aimed at increasing voter participation among patients. While the original focus was on registering patients to vote in the emergency department, our residents recognized that this did not address the fact that patient's admitted to the hospital could not vote.

For additional context, my hospitals serve a predominantly Black population, and many of our elderly patients remember voting for the first time with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. For many, voting is not just a civic duty, but a symbol of their hard-won rights. To help these people vote, we developed a structured plan to help them exercise this right while receiving care:

### **Three-Day Voting Assistance Schedule:**

#### ***\*\*Two days before election day: \*\****

Our team, consisting of physicians, medical students, and ancillary staff, goes room-to-room to identify registered voters and provide absentee ballot applications. Patients who express interest, or who are expected to be hospitalized on election day, are given the necessary forms to complete.

#### ***\*\*One day before election day: \*\****

The absentee ballot applications are collected, submitted to the Board of Elections, and we return with the patients' official ballots. Some of these ballots are collected on the same day, while others will be collected on Election Day.

#### ***\*\*Election day: \*\****

We collect the completed ballots. A dedicated team ensures these are promptly delivered back to the Board of Elections so each patient's vote is counted.

This initiative has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my residency. It offers a chance to connect with patients in a way that goes beyond their diagnosis or treatment plan. Instead of focusing on medical conditions like pneumonia or heart failure, we engage with them as fellow citizens, helping them fulfill a civic responsibility that is meaningful to them.

While some patients have brushed me aside when I ask if they'd like to vote, many patients, especially those who were worried they might not be able to vote, have expressed their gratitude and relief.

If you're interested in being part of this effort to empower our patients to vote at your local institution, please reach out at:

[shanesolger@gmail.com](mailto:shanesolger@gmail.com)