

Officials work to prepare hospitals for expected surge in patients

By JAKE THOMAS
OREGON CAPITAL BUREAU

In the face of an exponentially expanding virus, St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton declared its own version of a state of emergency on Monday.

St. Anthony President Harry Geller told a small Rotary Club audience that the hospital's "external disaster plan" would allow the hospital to access medical equipment from a national inventory and expand the number of hospital beds it has available to address the coronavirus.

Geller said St. Anthony's 25 beds were almost all being used Monday, but the hospital could expand to 60 beds in anticipation of a surge of COVID-19 cases. If needed, Geller said the hospital could erect tents in the parking lot to create more room for coronavirus cases.

As another measure, Geller said St. Anthony canceled many of its elective surgeries this week to free up medical equipment for potential COVID-19 cases.

The coronavirus has the potential to be far deadlier than the seasonal flu, with Geller pointing out that the current U.S. mortality rate for COVID-19 was 1.7% while the flu's rate was 0.1%. He added that it was hard to draw a "distinct conclusion" from the numbers, but "simple math" showed that the coronavirus had 17 times the mortality rate as influenza.

"Right now, in the United States, we have 4,200 positive COVID cases. ... That number is doubling every six days. It's increasing exponentially, and that's where the CDC is concerned," he said.

Good Shepherd

In Hermiston, Good Shepherd Medical Center announced visiting restrictions Tuesday.

"Until further notice,



Good Shepherd Medical Center's sign in Hermiston advertises restricted visiting during the COVID-19 crisis.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell

GSHCS is strongly encouraging community members not to visit campus unless they require health care services," the release stated.

Visitors are limited to one person per patient, and children under 13 are not allowed as a visitor unless they are visiting a single parent.

Anyone seeking non-emergency medical care from Good Shepherd Health Care System should call ahead. All patients should enter the campus on the Elm Street entrance for screening, and only certain building entrances will be open. Between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. only the Emergency Room entrance will be unlocked.

All Education Department classes and activities are suspended until further notice.

Good Shepherd Clinic Pharmacy will provide free prescription delivery services to patients' households. Patients should call 541-667-3652 to make arrangements for deliveries, or for curbside pick-up of

medications at Entrance C. "The community's partnership in helping us reduce the number of people in our facilities will allow us to focus on caring for our patients," Jodi Gavel, Good Shepherd infection preventionist, said in a statement. "These containment efforts our health care system has put into place, along with the restrictions set forth by our state, will help reduce the spread of infectious disease in our communities."

Statewide

As the coronavirus continues to spread in Oregon, the state is on a path to run out of hospital beds particularly by next month without a significant slowing of the disease or drastic response by public health officials.

Gov. Kate Brown and her health team Monday afternoon announced new statewide restrictions while mapping out a plan to boost the capacity of hospitals to deal with the expected wave of patients infected with COVID-19.

She banned gatherings of 25 or more — a substantial change from earlier prohibitions of gatherings of 250 or more. She ordered restaurants and bars to stop sit-down dining, but allowed them to provide delivery or takeout service.

"Isolation from our friends and neighbors is the only way to flatten the curve of transmission and get Oregon through this," Brown said.

The state now has a total of 65 people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, as of Tuesday afternoon.

"I know it's difficult to learn that we are seeing more active community spread of COVID-19, but this is something we've been expecting," said Dr. Dean Sideling, the state health officer and epidemiologist. "It's a good reminder to take steps to protect yourself, and vulnerable friends and family members, by washing your hands, covering your coughs and sneezes, and

FAST FACTS ABOUT COVID-19

Number of Oregonians who have tested positive: 65
Known cases in the United States: 5,303*
U.S. deaths of known COVID-19 patients: 96*
Most common symptoms: Coughing, fever, shortness of breath, fatigue

Why health officials are concerned: The COVID-19 strain of the coronavirus appears to be more contagious than the flu and kills a higher percentage of people who catch it (somewhere between 1% and 3%, compared to .01% for the flu). Social distancing measures being put into place will help the more serious cases that require hospitalization to be reduced and spread out over a longer period of time, allowing hospitals to keep up with the demand for ventilators and other life-saving resources.

*According to the *New York Times* tally of each state's reported cases, as of 3 p.m. Tuesday

staying home and away from others if you're sick."

State health officials revealed the results of modeling done by Oregon Health and Science University of how the pandemic virus will hit Oregon. They repeated earlier forecasts of 75,000 infected Oregonians but added that they expected the number of known cases to double every six days without strong action.

Dr. Dana Hargunani, the chief medical officer for the Oregon Health Authority, starkly explained what would happen if a spike in cases can't be averted.

"We will not be able to save everyone," Hargunani said.

She said physicians could face "heartbreaking decisions" as Oregon "a stark new phase" with the virus.

Dr. Renee Edwards, OHSU chief medical officer, said the modeling showed Oregon would need an additional 1,000 hospital beds and 400 intensive care unit beds to accommodate the surge. The state's 62 hospitals have 6,600 beds.

Edwards said that 20% of those who contract COVID-19 would require hospitalization.

Oregon needs to quickly add hospital beds across the

state to cope.

She said that OHSU, for example, could need 80 ICU beds for expected COVID-19 patients by mid-April — double what it has.

"This happens to be near our current ICU capacity," she said. "And on a normal day, our ICU is already full of Oregonians who need critical care, even without the COVID crisis."

Brown said the state intended to "expand bed capacity by adding beds in non-hospital settings," although she didn't elaborate.

Oregon has one of the lowest per-capita bed rates nationally. The state has just 1.6 hospital beds per 1,000 people, according to data from the Kaiser Family Foundation.

In Portland, Kaiser Permanente, Legacy Health, Providence Health and OHSU plan to operate as a single entity to build capacity, coordinate medical responses and prevent a shortage of hospital beds.

While the effort is based in the Portland area, Brown said it could function as a model for the rest of the state.

Staff writers Antonio Sierra and Jade McDowell contributed to this report.



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