

# Nurse recalls early days of city's hospital



Nurses' station, Providence Seaside Hospital, 1990s, featuring the arrival of computers.

Providence Seaside Archives

**SEEN FROM SEASIDE**

R.J. MARX



When emergency room nurse Mary Romanaggi started at Providence Seaside Hospital in 1982, nurses performed all sorts of tasks, from boiler room repairs to holiday cooking.

There were no kitchen staff, no receptionists, Romanaggi said. "Somebody rang the doorbell and you ran out there," she said.

When an emergency physician was unavailable, nurses called the doctor at home.

The emergency room, staffed with one nurse, often required an extra nurse to be called in.

Romanaggi's nearly four decades of service comes as Providence Seaside celebrates the 40th year of the Sisters of Providence assuming sponsorship of Seaside General Hospital.

In 1934, the former Mercer Hospital became Seaside General Hospital. The city sold bonds in 1945 to pay for a new hospital, which opened the next year, at South Franklin and Avenue S.

In December 1967, the state board of health approved a \$1.2 million bond for a new facility to be located on land annexed into the city in January 1968 on a slope east of South Wahanna Road.

Providence assumed sponsorship of the 55-bed hospital on July 1, 1981.

In December 2017, the foundation board launched the "Beyond 911" program to expand emergency care at the hospital and with a goal to raise \$1.5 million toward a \$5 million rebuild. The emergency department debuted in July 2020 and sees more than 10,000 patients a year, with increased traffic on holidays and seasonally.

The hospital invested more than \$16.2 million to improve community health in 2020, according to hospital spokesperson Mike Antrim, including \$820,000 in community health services and \$2.7 million in free and low-cost care.

Today's emergency room features a larger waiting and registration area, along with a triage room and nine private treatment rooms. The department is staffed with up to four nurses, seeing sometimes 40 patients a day.

Emergency room volumes vary throughout the day, but are typically busier during the summer, Antrim said.

With Life Flight Network medics and telehealth options to help diagnose heart attacks and strokes, technology has made a vast difference in patient care, Romanaggi said. A robot can identify if a stroke is suspected, and straight to a CAT scan and neurologist to receive clot-dissolving medication right away.

Because of the pandemic, this past year-and-a-half has been particularly stressful, Romanaggi said.

The hospital is "really busy," a trend among hospitals everywhere, Romanaggi said. "We're feeling it across Oregon and across the country. I think part of it is folks had put off care for the past 18 months."

Getting through the pandemic literally tips a lot of people over the edge, she said. "Nurses used to love to come work in the emergency room in critical care," she said. "Today, a lot of nurses don't want to go in that direction."

New programs and recruitment aim to correct that balance, with a focus on technical skills and critical thinking.

A new emergency services manager, Kathy Gantz, joined the staff late last month.



Emergency room nurse Mary Romanaggi.



Procession through the hospital led by crucifer Sr. Ignatia Marie Lindekugel, who served as director of pastoral care. She is followed by Sr. Scholastica Lee (left) and other sisters.



Sr. Ignatia Marie, Pastoral Services, Providence Seaside Hospital, 1982.

Providence Seaside Archives

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## Hospital: 'Our ICUs are filling up'

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emergency room for testing. Symptoms are so wide and varied, "we pretty much treat everybody like they've got COVID," Romanaggi said.

Results are delivered within an hour, she said. Positive cases go into isolation in the emergency department.

The hospital does not have data on coronavirus positive cases in the emergency room, but has had one coronavirus in-patient in the past two weeks, hospital spokesperson Mike Antrim said.

Last year, coronavirus patients were sent to Providence St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland for treatment. Now they remain in Seaside as long as they don't have to be on a ventilator.

"We provide care for COVID

patients based on the acuity of their illness," Antrim said. "The goal is to keep patients local when possible — and when it's not, we transfer to one of our Portland-area hospitals."

Across the Providence medical system, the hospital group is seeing a "surge of the unvaccinated," Lisa Vance, president of strategy and operations for Providence North said Friday in urging Oregonians to get vaccinated.

"Our COVID inpatient numbers are approaching the highest levels of the pandemic. Our ICUs are filling up," Vance said. "We are maxing out our equipment that helps COVID patients breathe. Combine that with the surge, and it's obvious that urgent action is needed."

As of Aug. 6, more than 22,000 or about 57% of Clatsop County

residents were vaccinated. Most new cases of COVID-19 are seen among unvaccinated individuals, the county task force reported. Of 103 total new local cases between July 31 and Aug. 6, 71 were unvaccinated, 13 vaccinated, two partially vaccinated, and 17 unknown. The task force reported 12 outbreaks.

Vaccination remains the best option for avoiding infection or, in rare breakthrough cases, reducing the severity of infection and need for hospitalization, and the risk of death.

Last week, Brown required state health care workers to get the vaccine or submit to weekly testing for the virus.

Providence doesn't mandate COVID vaccinations for its employees, but "most of our staff is vaccinated," Romanaggi said.

Several weeks ago Providence notified all caregivers and providers that they are required to validate vaccination or sign a statement declining the vaccine, with a deadline of Sept. 30, Vance said.

Those declining will now be required to do at least weekly additional testing on a regular basis, participate in mandatory education about the vaccine, adhere to enhanced personal protective equipment requirements, and other measures as needed to keep patients and caregivers safe, she said.

"Get vaccinated," Vance said. "Wear a mask. Take steps to take care of the other people in your community. The only way we can control this latest, more contagious variant is by working together. Providence is committed to doing that."

**PUBLIC MEETINGS**

Contact local agencies for latest meeting information and attendance guidelines.

**TUESDAY, AUG. 17**

**Seaside School District**, 6 p.m., seaside.k12.or.us/meetings.

**Gearhart Small Business Committee**, 6 p.m., cityofgearhart.com.

**Seaside Planning Commission**, 6 p.m., work session, 989 Broadway.

**WEDNESDAY, AUG. 18**

**Seaside Tourism Advisory Committee**, 3 p.m., 989 Broadway.

**Gearhart Parks Master Plan Citizens Advisory Committee**, 5:30 p.m., cityofgearhart.com.

**TUESDAY, AUG. 24**

**Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District**, 5:15 p.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center.

**TUESDAY, AUG. 31**

**Gearhart City Council and Planning Commission**, work session, 6:30 p.m., cityofgearhart.com.

**WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 1**

**Seaside Improvement Commission**, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.



**PUBLISHER**  
Kari Borgen

**EDITOR**  
R.J. Marx

**CIRCULATION MANAGER**  
Shannon Arlint  
**ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER**  
Sarah Silver-Tecza

**PRODUCTION MANAGER**  
John D. Bruijn  
**SYSTEMS MANAGER**  
Carl Earl

**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**  
Skyler Archibald  
Joshua Heineman  
Katherine Lacaze  
Esther Moberg

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