

Hospital Response and Preparation for COVID-19

By Dan Brinkman

As the only acute hospital in the East Hawaii Region, we, along with our communities, are facing unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to share with you what we are doing on the local level to prepare for this global emergency.

Simply, our overall goal is to increase our hospital's capacity by up to two-thirds more beds so that we can care for our community in their time of need. We need to utilize every resource we have available to us, and I thank all of the individuals, organizations and businesses that have donated supplies to help with our preparedness. We all know that supplies take time to get all the way to Hilo, and that is why we are amassing all that we can, so we can have them stored on our campus and ready for use.

I believe our efforts will save lives. Our families, friends and neighbors will come to us and we must be ready to care for them. We are expecting our staff's best efforts because this responsibility rests on all our shoulders...and we are preparing.

As we all have realized, this is not our "typical emergency." It will likely be a slow and painful course. I have asked all of our staff and physicians to prepare for several months of maximum effort. Many are already working outside their regular jobs, working different shifts and overtime. Ultimately, while we will do all we can to protect our staff, we know some of us will get sick, but we are prepared to get better and come back and care for our community again.

Our hospital and physician leadership have created a 5-Stage COVID-19 Management Plan. We are currently in Stage 2 as we have not had a confirmed case of community acquired COVID. Many of the preparations required in our plan are behind the scenes such as staff training, emergency hires, and securing additional beds. Other preparations are easier to see such as constructing a new triage entrance and outfitting the expanded screening area with power and other utilities. Additionally, we are working with various agencies and other health care organizations to manage scarce resources and share best practices for managing this crisis.

A large part of preparing for this pandemic is both augmenting and managing our Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supply. We are preserving PPE by cancelling elective surgeries and minimizing waste of PPE by controlling inappropriate overuse. We are chasing down supplies from all over the world and from within our own community. Supplies are limited and the supply chain is unpredictable, so we must be cautious and preserve our precious PPE. Our caregivers cannot be unprotected when the surge in COVID patients comes.

I sincerely hope that our island is spared the worst. However, if we have to face tough times, I am confident we all will do our family, friends and neighbors proud. I am so thankful for our

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staff and for their commitment to caring for our people, and I'm very proud to be part of our ohana of healthcare providers.

Please continue to help flatten the curve...Stay safe at home.

Dan Brinkman is the East Hawaii Regional CEO, Hawaii Health Systems Corporation.

This column was prepared by Community First, a nonprofit established to help the community respond to the health-care cost crisis and support initiatives that change health care from just treating disease to caring for health.