



Director's Desk

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Director

I am so proud of the contributions that the entire DHS workforce has been making in response to the unprecedented Coronavirus pandemic. This issue of The Pulse highlights several instances of teams stepping up to meet the needs of this moment, including in ensuring that our staff and patients have the supplies and equipment they need, collecting donations from the community, and working creatively and collaboratively as part of our surge plan to decompress our hospitals and free up staff, beds and equipment for an anticipated influx of corona-positive patients.

These are just a few of the countless stories of the great work our DHS workforce is doing every day. I want you to know how much I appreciate the work that all of you per-

form in service to our patients and communities. The work all of you do, whether directly with patients or in support of your colleagues, helps to save lives. What could be more important than that? The success stories you share with me are also a great reminder of how we do our best, most effective work: as one team. By collaborating to always do what is best for patients and staff, we will be able to successfully navigate through this crisis together.

We are also beginning to look at how we begin to restore and reimagine our clinical and administrative services, in the midst of the ongoing COVID pandemic, in a way that better positions DHS to achieve our vision of being a national recognized integrated health system.

Again, I want to thank everyone for their dedication and commitment during this time. Also, to all our dedicated nursing staff, I just want to thank you and Happy Nurses Week.

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Acting as one system to prepare for a surge

Teams across DHS have been stepping up to help decompress our hospitals as part of our preparations for an anticipated surge of COVID-19 positive patients. This effort has involved unprecedented collaboration across and beyond DHS, as teams have been brought together to transfer non-COVID-19 patients to dedicated facilities in order to create capacity at other hospitals.

Most of this work has been coordinated through the new DHS Transfer Center, located in Santa Fe Springs. Staff at the Transfer Center have quickly pivoted from a focus on repatriating DHS patients from non-DHS facilities to transferring patients without COVID-19 to Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center, three Alta hospitals and the U.S. Navy ship the USNS Mercy.

At the DHS Transfer Center, three teams are collaborating closely to ensure the safe and appropriate transfer of patients to these facilities. The Medical Alert Center takes requests for patient transfers. The Utilization Management team performs medical review of these cases and ensures that any transfer is medically sound; and the Central Dispatch Office team oversees the safe transport of patients to these dedicated sites.

"This strategy helps to ensure that when we get a surge of COVID-19 positive patients, we will be ready to care for them at our acute care hospitals," said DHS Fuse Fellow Ernest Shahbazian, who is helping to lead efforts at the Transfer Center. "We've worked as one team and one network, and not as separate hospitals." Some examples include:

- U.S. Navy staff have begun working out of the DHS Transfer Center to ensure close and efficient collaboration.
- Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center staff have pivoted swiftly to take on transfers from acute care County hospitals.



- Other DHS teams have gotten involved to help patients without COVID-19 upon discharge. Social workers at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center are assisting patients in transitioning back to their lives when they leave the USNS Mercy.

According to Captain John Rotruck, Commanding Officer of Medical Treatment Facility on the USNS Mercy, "Mercy got underway from San Diego with a five day notice in order to be the relief valve for medical facilities in Los Angeles as they care for COVID-19 patients. Our mission is to treat patients aboard Mercy who are not COVID-19 positive. This frees up beds across LA so that the medical professionals can turn their skills and attention toward fighting COVID-19. We are demonstrating the power of Navy medicine on behalf of our country."

Shahbazian praised the work of teams across our system to develop and implement new processes and workflows to meet these new demands. "We've had amazing teamwork and staff have done a great job."

Ensuring safety for all of our patients

As part of our efforts to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, DHS is implementing proactive changes in our outpatient clinics to ensure that we are ready for an anticipated surge in patients. According to DHS Associate Medical Director, Dr. Paul Giboney this strategy consists of three main components:

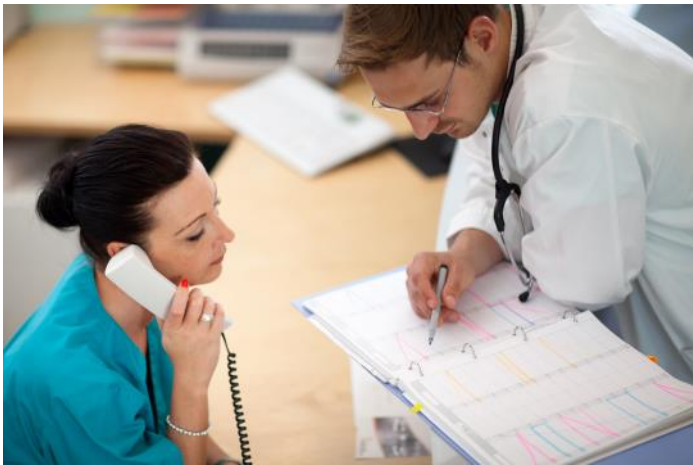
- Practice social distancing. In order to prevent a massive, overwhelming surge in patients, it is best to prevent infection by keeping people home whenever possible.
- Preparing for a surge, by making available all possible healthcare workforce members and supplies and resources, such as ventilators and hospital beds.
- Preserving personal protective equipment (PPE).

In order to achieve these objectives, DHS is identifying opportunities to deliver care via telehealth modalities like phone visits or communication via the Patient Portal. When that is not possible, we have been strategically postponing, deferring and rescheduling outpatient and elective care that is deemed to be non-essential. DHS specialty provider groups worked to achieve consensus on Expected Practices to determine which conditions could be safely deferred for two months, and then to evaluate each patient specifically to validate if an appointment can be safely postponed.

While this approach is new, says Dr. Giboney, “We’ve had absolutely fantastic 100% engagement across our system,” from both providers and staff. “Providers have worked 24/7 to come to consensus decisions about what care is essential. Then clerks, medical assistants and nurses have reached out to patients to explain what we’re doing and rescheduling them accordingly.”

Dr. Giboney attributes the willingness and capability of providers and staff to achieve this huge shift to three things:

- Shared agreement about the importance of this approach, and a sense that everyone’s voice is heard and concerns addressed as decisions are made.



- An iterative process of dialogue in which providers can talk through how best to respond to the various scenarios we face.
- A plan for follow up, in which decisions about deferring care will be reevaluated after two months.

DHS Specialty Workgroups have been identifying and implementing approaches to support this strategy. Some examples include:

- Early on, Dentistry, which is a large consumer of PPE and elective care, proactively initiated an Expected Practice to postpone elective procedures to free up supplies and capacity for the system
- Surgeons across DHS rapidly pivoted to reschedule elective cases

“While we don’t know if we will experience a surge similar New York City’s,” says Dr. Giboney, “what all this has done is given us the opportunity to be as prepared as we possibly can be. We’re much more prepared than we would have been had the surge happened in early March.”

Housing for Health goes above and beyond to care for our most vulnerable patients and communities

The DHS Housing for Health team has been responding to the coronavirus crisis by taking extraordinary steps to care for people who are especially vulnerable to infection because they are experiencing homelessness. DHS cares for people experiencing homelessness in our hospitals and clinics and through Housing for Health, which is one of the largest providers of housing and support services for people experiencing homelessness in the country.

“I am so proud of how our doctors, nurses, social workers and small but mighty team of program managers and support staff are getting it done every day,” said Cheri Todoroff, Director of Community Programs and Interim Director of Housing for Health.

In order to reach people living on the streets, Housing for Health proactively deploys outreach teams who conduct education, screening and testing. One of the most urgent priorities is to get people into sheltered environments, where risk of infection can be reduced. Patients over age 65 or with complex medical conditions are particularly at risk. For people who aren’t prepared to be sheltered, Housing for Health provides food and water, and makes plans to follow up with them to try to get them connected to the services they need.

DHS operates two clinics on Skid Row focused on caring for patients experiencing homelessness, the Star Clinic and the Union Mission Rescue Clinic. They have added more telehealth services so that patients can be treated without an in-person visit.

For patients being discharged from DHS hospitals, Housing for Health has expanded hours. The Access and Referral

team is available on weekends, to assist individuals in getting placement in interim housing or recuperative care. Collaborating with hospital discharge planners and social workers, Housing for Health was able to place over 100 patients who had been in hospitals for long periods of time into licensed board and care facilities in just 30 days.

Housing for Health collaborates with agencies and organizations that provide services to people experiencing homelessness, including providing training on infection prevention and how to care for patients who are either symptomatic for COVID-19 or test positive for the virus.

For patients who are symptomatic or test positive and are not able to self-isolate, DHS’s Housing for Health team, in partnership with the Office of Emergency Management and the Department of Public Health, moved swiftly to establish new quarantine and isolation sites to provide care. The locations include: Dockweiler Beach, Mayfair, within part of the MLK Recuperative Care Center, Sherman Oaks and Bell Gardens. DHS is also partnering with area hotels and motels to open 15,000 beds to people experiencing homelessness who are over age 65 or have complex medical conditions.

“Our motto is to do whatever it takes,” says Cheri Todoroff. “And I have seen that every day since this started. I am so proud of the hard work, compassion, and commitment of everyone in DHS who has stepped up during this crisis.”

For more information about DHS’s Housing for Health programs, please contact Cheri Todoroff at ctodoroff@dhs.lacounty.gov.

Innovating behind the scenes to take care of our staff

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, DHS is making extraordinary efforts to source and procure all the necessary equipment and supplies to protect patients and staff.

“We’ve done a lot in the last month as a system,” says Jason Ginsberg, DHS Chief of Supply Chain. This includes rapid diversification of vendors to ensure that we always have sufficient supplies such as thermometers, hand sanitizer, and personal protective equipment (PPE) including masks, face shields, gowns and gloves. With global supply chain delays, we are also sourcing more from local vendors, including an area brewery that recently shifted to begin manufacturing hand sanitizer.

This has meant that Supply Chain staff have needed to adapt their work, from a traditional approach focused primarily on procurement to a new approach that requires following-up on leads and identifying and vetting new vendors.

Leaders across DHS have also risen to the challenge by collaborating to constantly shift resources to ensure that every facility has sufficient supplies at any given moment. “We all take the perspective that we need to do what’s best for DHS,” says Ginsberg, with each facility taking turns either sharing or receiving supplies as the situation warrants. He attributes this success at system-wide collaboration to the trust that is fostered by

building relationships and sharing information transparently.

LAC+USC Supply Chain Director Dolores Gonzalez describes how her team’s work has changed in response to this crisis. In the context of a shift from stable and predictable inventory patterns to needs that fluctuate significantly based on patient flow and census, staff not only have to keep up with increased volume but simultaneously monitor and adjust inventory levels. The team run two warehouses for LAC+USC that operate 24/7, and also service the DHS Star Clinic and Housing for Health program. “All my staff have stepped up above and beyond,” she says. “Everyone has realized how critical the situation is. They know that staff like doctors and nurses who care for patients depend on us to get them what they need.”

Harbor-UCLA Medical Center Chief Operating Officer Azar Kattan described how staff at several medical centers created assembly lines to assemble face shields with materials purchased at area fabric stores. “DHS has really pulled together,” she says. She praised the efforts of enterprise and facility supply chain leaders to ensure that patient and staff needs are always being met, and added, “The unknown is really hard, and I’m really impressed to see how our staff have risen to the occasion.”

Lawyers assist patients with COVID-19 issues

By Anna Gorman, MPH
Director of Community Partnerships & Programs

The coronavirus concerns run the gamut: Lost jobs, cut-off benefits and the inability to pay rent.

While medical providers at clinics and hospitals are doing everything possible to keep patients healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic, a team of nonprofit lawyers are helping resolve a host of other issues that threaten patients’ wellbeing.

The Medical Legal Community Partnership-Los Angeles is a collaboration between the Department of Health Services (DHS) and nonprofit legal services providers that address patient barriers to food, housing, benefits or employment. Those barriers can cause individuals to face homelessness and make it more difficult to manage chronic diseases.

The lawyers provide free legal services to DHS patients. During the COVID-19 crisis, their work has become even more critical. “There are more legal issues due to COVID-19,” said Eve Rubell, DHS’s program manager. And even after the crisis passes, Rubell said there likely will be an increase in homelessness, joblessness and domestic violence and, “the attorneys are prepared to help.”

The legal teams recently led a webinar to inform DHS staff about numerous local, state and federal policy changes enacted due to COVID-19. For example, California has instituted new policies to protect renters from eviction. Some people who qualify for unemployment benefits will receive more money each week.

“Our goal is to be able to digest all these different changes around housing, benefits, employment, public charge and immigration so we can let our clinic partners know,” said Gerson Sorto, supervising attorney at Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County, the lead legal organization. DHS also partners with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Mental Health Advocacy Services and Bet Tzedek Legal Services.

The program started in 2018 and has earned both local and national recognition. Lawyers are normally on site at Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center, Long Beach Comprehensive Health Center (CHC), Mid-Valley CHC, MLK, Jr., El Monte CHC, Olive View-UCLA Medical Center and Harbor-UCLA Medical Center and also take referrals from community health workers. The program has plans to expand to other sites.

During COVID-19, the program has temporarily moved to a telephonic model and the lawyers are taking referrals from

doctors, social workers and others. They are increasingly seeing cases related to coronavirus. “Patients are losing their jobs, they are exhausting their sick time and they are now having concerns about paying their rent and putting food on the table,” Sorto said. “Our goal is to really help patients break those concerns down ... and help them benefit from new protections.”

In one recent case, a woman with chronic respiratory issues was di-

rected by her doctor to stay home because of COVID-19. She was worried about being unable to pay her mortgage and exhausting her paid time off from work. The legal team advised her on new protections from foreclosure and is working with her to request postponement of mortgage payments and possibly disability-related assistance.

In another case, a woman was laid off from her job because of COVID-19 and couldn’t afford her rent. The lawyers helped her understand a new eviction moratorium and guided her on what to tell her landlord. Now the client has a plan to remain housed and preserve her limited unemployment dollars for essential purchases.

“We are very much still open for business,” Sorto said. “We are eager to continue serving our clients.”

Please refer patients directly to the Medical Legal Community Partnership-Los Angeles at your site. If your site doesn’t have a legal partner, please contact legalhelp@dhs.lacounty.gov.



The legal partners and DHS staff gather for a retreat.

Businesses, organizations and individuals rally to support DHS as we care for our communities

DHS works every day to advance the health of our patients and communities. During the coronavirus crisis, communities are giving back to DHS by donating equipment and resources to help us get through this together.

“People are coming together,” says Manal Dudar, DHS Chief of Financial Operations Division, who is overseeing the accounting of all donations for DHS. “There is a lot of recognition for the frontline staff, from doctors and nurses to the EVS staff who clean our facilities.”

In March, DHS distributed a flyer announcing three drop-off sites at LAC+USC, Olive View and Harbor-UCLA Medical Centers for donations of new and used medical equipment, including masks, gowns, gloves and hand sanitizer. In response,

individuals, organizations and businesses have responded with donations large and small.

“We’re getting a very good response,” says Jason Ginsberg, DHS Chief of Supply Chain Management. “The community is stepping up and helping wherever they can.”

Examples of recent donations include:

- Eighteen pallets of personal protective equipment (PPE) from Harbor Freight and Tools
- Face shields and twenty gallons of hand sanitizer from Tesla
- Complimentary coffee service for staff at LAC+USC in April from Morrison Healthcare



- Protective gloves from noted tattoo artist Kat Von D
- Hotel rooms from USC Hotel for LAC+USC staff

In their donation letter, Morrison wrote, “We hope that this contribution will provide a small comfort to the staff during this very difficult time, as well as reinforce your mission to retain compassionate, caring employees who will provide accessible, affordable and culturally sensitive health care, one person at a time.”

For any questions, please contact medsupply@dhs.lacounty.gov.



DHS thanks our friends for their support and generous contributions to our front line staff!

Thank you to the following groups and businesses for their donations in appreciation of our hard-working staff — the food was amazing!

- Alikis’s Greek Tavern
- Ding Tea
- Gohard Society
- LawWorks Workspace for Lawyers + Tita Celia’s
- Mabuhay Credit Union + Silog Filipino Fusion
- McCarthy Building + Panera Bread
- Southland Credit Union + Subway
- Talas Mexican & Salvadorian Restaurant
- Victory Outreach + Giuliano’s Bakery

