

Sutter's integrated health system improves care for patients during the pandemic from Crescent City to San Francisco

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Since the beginning of the pandemic, Sutter Health's network of 22 hospitals has reduced the stays for COVID-19 patients from an average of 20 days to just eight days today, thanks to a coordinated response deployed by the integrated healthcare system.

It is one of the ways to show the power of an integrated network in responding to this health emergency. Care teams across the Sutter Health network give patients high-quality care whether at large medical centers in San Francisco and Sacramento or rural hospitals in Crescent City and Lake County.

"Rural hospitals such as ours in Crescent City face unique challenges in terms of resources and the expertise needed from specially trained physicians and nurses," said Mitch Hanna, CEO of Sutter Coast Hospital. "But, the Sutter integrated network has been there every step of the way with necessary supplies and immediate access to the specialists that helped us care safely and successfully for our community, regardless of the patients' ability to pay for care."

Some other key examples of the effectiveness of Sutter Health's integrated network include:

The ability to increase care capacity by 200-300% in the midst of the pandemic

Expanding telehealth services to shift from serving 20 to 7,000 patient visits per day

Doubling the capacity of remote electronic intensive care units so patients could access 24/7 critical care specialists

Reallocating crucial resources to get personal protective equipment and ventilators where they were needed most

"We made investments very early on in the beginnings of our network so that we could best support the hospitals, care centers and other health services in our communities," said William Isenberg, M.D., chief quality and safety officer for Sutter Health. "That planning has helped us in ways we could never have imagined during the pandemic, as well as during some of the wildfires that have touched parts of our Northern California service area."

Sutter Health serves one of the most demographically and geographically diverse regions in the nation, which means the healthcare system works to identify and respond to the different needs of different communities. An integrated network is able to quickly respond and adjust to the needs in local communities.

An integrated network also supports an easier sharing of best practices, which can help improve clinical outcomes. For instance, care teams across Sutter were able to minimize the need for ventilators in COVID-19-positive patients by using other appropriate therapies. Consistent meetings and briefings between hospital clinical leaders and those within Sutter Health's Emergency Management System helped provide the timeliest information and developments. Hospital clinical leaders then could quickly turn around and share these findings and approaches with their own hospital incident command centers and teams on the ground.

"Our mission has always focused on enhancing the well-being of all residents in Del Norte County and surrounding communities and we meet that mission when we collaborate with teams across our network," Hanna added. "These efforts have made an even greater impact during these past seven months – helping improve patient outcomes and slow the spread of the virus. While there are still many unknowns with the pandemic, our network has the structure and our teams have the experience and expertise to continue serving the needs of patients and families throughout Northern California."