

Guest commentary: COVID-19: Let's spread information, not illness

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During the public health crisis of COVID-19, it's understandable to feel concerned. We look around and see the increasing number of cases, the canceled events, the closed schools, and we can't help but worry for the health of ourselves and our families.

First and foremost, Sutter Coast Hospital and everyone at Sutter Health want to assure you that your health and safety remain our top concern. The most important guidance I can share with you today is that staying informed and focusing on preparedness are key to helping our community remain healthy and calm.

Here are a few simple things you can do to stay healthy and prevent the spread of germs:

- Adhere to local public health directives: Follow Del Norte County's direction and practice social distancing. If you are not feeling well and do not require immediate urgent care, stay home to prevent infecting others. If you are concerned about COVID-like symptoms, call Sutter Health's COVID-19 Advice line at 866-961-2889 to speak directly with a clinician who can direct you to the appropriate level of care. Call this line between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m., seven days a week, to talk with a clinician. This line is available to Sutter and non-Sutter patients alike.
- Do not delay urgent or preventive care: We understand people may be concerned about coming into clinical care centers during a pandemic. However, we strongly urge you not to delay care. We have implemented stringent safety standards and taken specific steps recommended by federal and state agencies to deliver care safely while protecting patients and staff from illness. If you need to see a Sutter physician, you can do so in

person or through a video visit. If you need emergency care, Sutter Coast Hospital is open and welcoming patients.

- Count to 20: Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds to keep germs from spreading. You can also use hand sanitizers if you aren't near soap and water.
- Protect your face: Avoid touching your face, and sneeze into tissues or your elbow, making sure to wash your hands afterward.
- Keep an eye on updates from Del Norte County for the latest on what's happening locally. That includes regular updates on test results, which the county reports recently stood at 48 positive cases out of more than 2,000 tests.

In the meantime, here's what we are doing at our hospital and across Sutter Health:

- We're prepared: Sutter Health has a long history of caring for patients with complex illnesses, including infectious diseases. Our teams are trained and equipped to provide high-quality care while protecting the safety of care providers, hospital staff and other teammates. Sutter Health's emergency response team activated early and remains on 24/7 watch to ensure our network is doing all we can to continue delivering care while remaining prepared for any potential surges.
- We adapted: We had an incredible and rapid response across our network to adapt our "normal" operations to respond to this pandemic.

Some of the ways in which we have adapted our operations include:

- Expanding video visits and other telehealth services to provide our patients and community members even more virtual care options.
- Activating the coronavirus advice line for Sutter and non-Sutter patients to call to get their questions answered quickly about any symptoms they might be having.
- Actively preparing for a potential surge, including plans to convert space to create additional critical care units
- Increasing our supply of PPE and other essential equipment like ventilators across our network.
- We're staying informed: We continue to work closely with county, state and federal agencies, including local county health departments and the CDC to address COVID-19 related issues. We are also keeping our staff and affiliated physicians throughout our integrated network prepared and informed.
- We're maintaining a safe environment: As part of our commitment to ensuring a safe environment for our patients, families and staff, we restricted visitors to our hospital, implemented universal masking and instituted mandatory workforce and visitor screenings at the hospital, including daily temperature checks for all staff.

- We're protecting you: Sutter Coast Hospital is screening respiratory illnesses away from the general population and continuing to ramp up our capability to test for the virus.
- We're protecting and supporting your caregivers: We are continuing to closely manage our supply of PPE and we will continue to work round the clock to secure additional PPE, so we can meet critical community need while maintaining patient and frontline staff safety. Right now, our supplies are adequate to meet our demand, but the global shortages of PPE remain a concern acutely felt by healthcare organizations across the nation, including us. Because we are part of Sutter Health's integrated system, we are able to shift supplies around our network to where they are needed most.
- We are part of an integrated network: While this crisis has challenged us in new ways, Sutter hospitals don't stand alone. We have an entire network backing us up and working to help ensure we have what we need to care for patients now, while continuing to prepare for future surges.

As always, the health and safety of our patients, care providers and the communities we serve remains our top priority. In return, we trust our community members to do what they can to help keep each other safe, healthy and armed with knowledge.

MITCH HANNA is CEO of Sutter Coast Hospital in Crescent City.