

COVID-19

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Extraordinary care for every generation.

Congratulations, Covenant HealthCare, for your Amazing Response to COVID-19!

At Covenant HealthCare, we've always known that our people, staff and physicians have what it takes to drive extraordinary care for our patients and communities. Our swift and thorough response to the global COVID-19 pandemic has only reinforced that belief. As a team, we have lived our values, working together to address COVID-19-related challenges, empower solutions, protect our workers and save lives – all while projecting an enthusiastic, can-do spirit of commitment and resolve. This special COVID-19 insert to *The Covenant Chart* newsletter pays tribute to you all, highlighting a few examples of the amazing response, on every front, to stop the spread of COVID-19 while protecting and helping our patients and each other.

“Virtual” Town Hall Meetings Draw Big Crowds

Dr. Kathleen Cowling, Covenant HealthCare Chief of Staff

The most important element to navigating through a crisis is clear communications. How do you achieve this, though, during an evolving pandemic and when you are under an executive order to abandon all face-to-face meetings? How do you keep people connected, informed and on the same page? You turn to technology, that is how.

After reviewing communications options with colleagues, we decided that holding virtual town hall meetings via WebEx would be the most effective way to share information with active medical staff. We are happy to report that this approach is working well, thanks to the support of hospital leadership, the flexibility of medical staff and access to Incident Command for current updates.

In fact, we are seeing record-high numbers of participants at these meetings – partly due to the pandemic topic which impacts us all, but also due to ease of attendance. It is very convenient and time-efficient to join a meeting at the touch of a keyboard, and easier to squeeze it in among other commitments.

Although I personally miss being able to shake hands and greet colleagues in person, I believe that we can continue our shared vision of caring for our community and each other by gathering together in the cloud, yet with our feet firmly on the ground and our hearts dedicated to patient care.

As we enter the “new normal” of working together, we will all find that we can still communicate, collaborate and innovate for patient success. Please continue to join these meetings and if you have any questions about access, feel free to connect with Leigh Ann Gabriel in the Medical Staff office at leigh.gabriel@chs-mi.com. ■

Helping Patients While Helping the Helpers

Dr. Michael Wolohan, Covenant Medical Group, Orthopaedics

Think back, for a moment, to March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic is real and too often treacherous and deadly. The hot spot in Detroit is striking closer to home, affecting many people in Michigan and our community.

At Covenant HealthCare, our coworkers are standing up, leaning in and making a difference. A nurse's 12-hour shift becomes longer as he or she makes sure that an elderly patient with COVID-19 is as comfortable as possible, knowing that the patient may not survive the shift. A housekeeper goes out of his way to extend a word of kindness and a blessing to a patient in need. A physical therapist shelters her own child with a relative so that she can continue to care for COVID-19 patients without infecting her child.

They, along with doctors, nurses and respiratory therapists on the front lines, and all members of the Covenant team, are helping patients wherever they can. What's more, we are helping each other too during these tough times – both emotionally and financially.

In April, for example, the Covenant Medical Staff and Covenant Foundation came together in a wonderfully collaborative effort to form the Covenant Medical Staff COVID-19 Fund, which is focused on providing periodic free meals to workers while at work, and to assist employees who have significant financial needs.

All gifts to this fund are made through the Covenant Foundation, matched dollar for dollar and are tax deductible. To those who have participated or are considering doing so, we truly appreciate your generosity!

We are grateful to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our amazing colleagues across Covenant, who inspire us to deliver extraordinary care every day. Thank you for leading us in the capacity to be our best selves, especially in moments of real crisis. ■

*“I was admitted to the hospital for pneumonia and COVID-19.
The doctor and nurses were very understanding and helpful; I appreciate them.”*

– COVID-19 PATIENT

Incident Command and Leadership Response to COVID-19

Beth Charlton, Executive Vice President of Operations and Chief Nursing Officer, Covenant HealthCare

In early March, as COVID-19 began to take hold in the United States, members of the Covenant HealthCare Executive Team began dedicating time to multiple efforts to prepare Covenant for the pandemic. On March 13, those efforts grew exponentially as we faced our first known case. It was a “trifecta” of firsts for us all: a first for Covenant and the county, our first Covenant employee and a first care provider/physician.

Since then, Incident Command has been fully functional. We developed 17 subcommittees for priority work that include the following: Access/Visitation, Training for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Supplies, Pharmacy, Infection Prevention, Staffing, Surgery, Regional Collaboration, Exposure Tracking, Patient Care/Logistics, VirtualCare, Hotline, Testing, Human Resources, Employee Resource and Wellness, Providers and Communications.

The work that has been accomplished by and through these teams has been nothing short of remarkable. Within days, testing algorithms and tents were set up, patient care units were dedicated and prepped, and a Hotline Team was mobilized and supported with technology to be a ready receiver for hundreds of calls. We ramped up the efforts for VirtualCare visits so quickly and successfully that the stability of the platform was challenged. We also created critical dashboards for tracking many key items such as supplies, medications, blood products and ventilators so that Covenant could be proactive and capable with timely care delivery.

We stand always ready to receive and operationalize, utilizing knowledge from the Centers for Disease Control, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the county and others. From updates in the state’s executive orders to new recommendations, responding is and remains challenging as the COVID-19 situation is novel and constantly changing. Communication has been key throughout, with virtual meetings and daily communications to the providers, Covenant employees and our leadership team.

Thankfully, we now are moving to a “new, go-forward normal” and Incident Command is meeting with a focus on returning to more “usual” operations while keeping a watchful eye on this unpredictable virus. The successes of the past months are too numerous to mention here, but together highlight the ability of Covenant to be innovative and creative, to demonstrate strong leadership and fortitude, and to have the courage to “try something new.” This all suggests – no, it proves – that anything is possible when you have dedicated people who stay committed to accomplishing safe, high-quality care and who remain *always* focused on patients, families, staff and our community.

I am humbled and proud to be a part of this story and this unbelievably wonderful team. Thank you for all that you always do. ■

Creating Safe, Best Practices for Peri-Procedural Areas

Dr. Michael Sullivan, Chief Medical Officer, Covenant HealthCare

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of service at Covenant HealthCare, from the way we treat patients to the configuration of the cafeteria and from our visitor policy to the areas where care is provided.

Through it all, we have been here for our community, our patients and each other. In response to the pandemic, Governor Whitmer placed temporary restrictions on non-essential medical and dental care. Since mid-March we have continued to provide emergency care and urgent, time-sensitive necessary care to those in need. In addition, we have essentially halted all elective procedures in our operating rooms, endoscopy suites, interventional cardiology and radiology areas.

This effort required us to implement new policies and procedures to safely care for our patients and to evaluate each procedure for medical necessity. The COVID-19 Surgery and

Procedural Subcommittee brought together a diverse and dedicated group of clinicians to undertake this task. Members include Drs. Bays, de Beaubien, Deibel, Mamaladze, Minnec, Richardson, Schinco, Sharma, Sullivan and Talati, along with Surgical Services Director Aime Goodrow and Cardiovascular Services Director Jackie Tinnin.

Together, they have collaborated on safe, best practices for all aspects of the peri-procedural areas including the operating rooms, endoscopy suites, cardiac interven-

tion areas, and interventional radiology areas. They brought together guidelines from the CDC and Surgical and Interventional Society, mapping them to our current patient load and workflows to optimize the care we provide.

This subcommittee was tasked with ensuring that the appropriate clinical care was provided for our patients while complying with the Governor’s order and minimizing the risks imposed by the pandemic. Once that task was achieved, it then transitioned to re-engaging our patient population to ensure them that Covenant is a safe environment for care. In conjunction with Aimie Goodrow, a Roadmap to Recovery Plan was developed and implemented to ensure the safety of our patients, staff and each other as we transition into a “new normal” state.

Many thanks to everyone who has worked hard to drive success during a period of great pressure and uncertainty. Your commitment to patient care and safety is nothing short of extraordinary. ■

“We just finished our video visit with our mom – it was great. We discussed her care while also seeing her. Four great-grandchildren joined in on the call. Thank you so much.”

– SON OF AN INPATIENT DURING RESTRICTED VISITATION

Providers Stay Focused on Patient Care

Dr. Matthew Deibel, Covenant Medical Group, Emergency Medicine

In March, when COVID-19 started to emerge in the Great Lakes Bay Region, it became especially important for providers to share information with each other quickly and efficiently about the pandemic and patient care. Physician leaders throughout Covenant HealthCare were asked to participate on a Provider Subcommittee – one of 17 subcommittees formed by COVID-19 Incident Command – to discuss provider challenges and solutions amid a rapidly changing pandemic environment.

More than a dozen physician leaders now sit on the Provider Subcommittee, which meets virtually several times a week, bringing a valuable, interdisciplinary perspective to every discussion (see sidebar). This diversity of thought has enabled the group to quickly identify patient care, safety and practice issues and how to best address them, such as the shortage of testing and managing a potential COVID patient. There have also been many discussions about PPE and potential treatment options. Most recently, the subcommittee has worked on moving to a “new normal” during the pandemic, allowing important patient care to continue in a safe manner.

It has been inspiring to work with such a talented and dedicated group of physicians. Good ideas are becoming even better ideas after fruitful discussion. Collaboration is at an all-time high, as is keeping an open mind about unique solutions like telehealth. Each member of this team is also representing the needs of his or her specialty extremely well, while taking information back to their groups. Much of the information disseminated to providers to date, in fact, started as discussions in this group.

There is no question that the insights and relationships gained from working closely together on such a national and global emergency will make the medical staff that much stronger moving forward. The care they show for each other, their patients and their community is nothing short of extraordinary. ■

PROVIDER SUBCOMMITTEE

Dr. Matthew Deibel

*Subcommittee Lead, Assistant Chief Medical Officer,
ECC Medical Director*

Dr. Kathleen Cowling

Chief of Staff

Dr. Trasi Crumrin

Primary Care/VirtualCare

Jamie Furbush

Inpatient Practices Director

Dr. John Georgakopoulos

Medical Director, MedExpress Services

Dr. Pramod Kalagara

Hospital Medicine

Dr. Ganesh Kini

Medical Director, Hospital Medicine Department

Dr. Iris Marteja

Vice President and CEO, Covenant Medical Group

Dr. Omer Mirza

Medical Director, Critical Care Services

Dr. Todd Richardson

Surgical Services, Department of Surgery Chair

Dr. Aaron Smith

*Chief Medical Informatics Officer, Clinical Operations Coordinator,
Emergency Care Center*

Dr. David Stockman

Medical Director, Laboratory Services

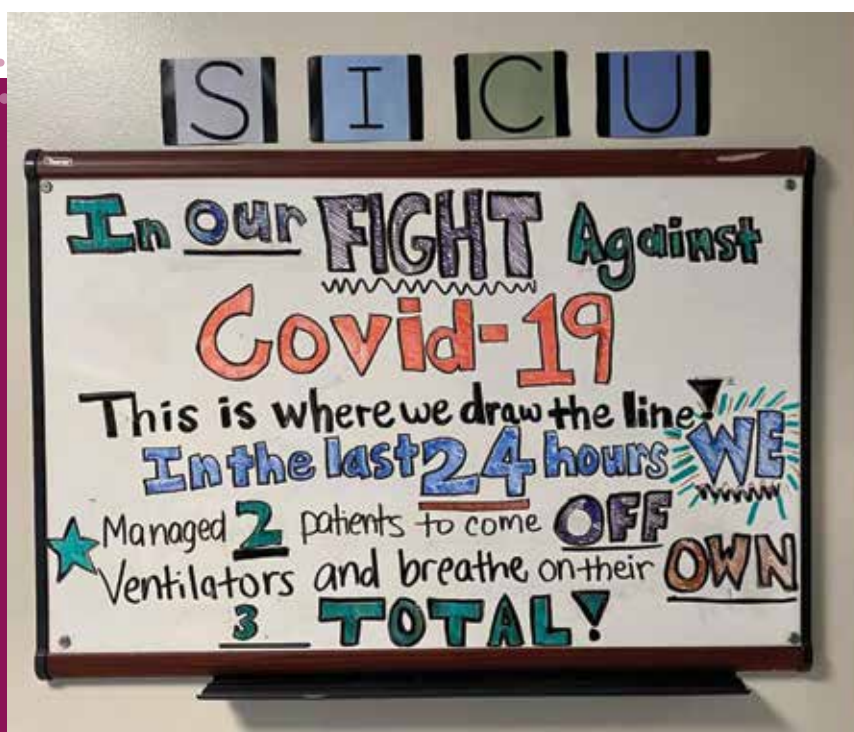
CRITICAL PARTNER REPRESENTATIVES

Dr. Ron Gonzales

Covenant HealthCare Partners, Chief Medical Officer

Dr. Mary Jo Wagner

CMU Medical Education Partners, Chief Academic Officer



The Rise of Telehealth During COVID-19

Dr. Iris Marteja, Vice President and CEO, Covenant Medical Group

Prior to the pandemic, Covenant HealthCare was already in the telehealth space, working with InTouch Health, a best-in-class virtual care vendor. However, many factors were at play in preventing the local and nationwide adoption of telehealth, including the fact that insurance companies, physicians and patients were not fully on board for various reasons. As a result, the number of patient encounters remained low. But then COVID-19 hit the scene, forcing us all to change how we practice medicine almost overnight.

Pushing Telehealth Forward

With the pandemic, restrictions were imposed on ambulatory clinics to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, significantly changing how we care for patients. Physician offices rescheduled non-urgent, new-patient visits. We also pushed back chronic disease follow-up visits for patients aged 60 and older, cancelled Medicare wellness visits and physicals, and deferred elective surgeries to later dates. For the remaining allowable cases, we modified quite a few processes to maintain social distancing. In the first week of the executive order to “shelter in place” and restrictions on surgeries, we saw our volumes decrease by as much as 60%. The pandemic was causing both clinical and financial challenges to medical practices and hospitals alike. We all needed an effective solution, and fast.

One key solution was telehealth: safe, proven and available. Amid the pandemic, the clamor for telehealth was growing across the country and the government was quick to support, placing waivers on video and audio encounters, and covering virtual visits under new CMS recommendations. When CMS sent those waivers, other insurance payers started to follow suit.

Fortunately, Covenant already had a telehealth platform called VirtualCare – we just had to ramp it up quickly across our medical staff and clinics. Chief Information Officer Frank Fear and VirtualCare Administrator Jaime Magness, along with the rest of the Information Technology (IT) Team, worked long hours to make this happen. With the physician practices, IT worked with operational leaders and frontline staff to train and adapt VirtualCare in the practices. Physician champions helped pilot any process changes and patients were informed that VirtualCare was an option for clinic visits.

Challenges and Solutions

One key telehealth challenge was related to connectivity issues ranging from user error and poor internet connection to server issues or system overload. The connection rate, for

example, was only 75% – meaning one in four patients could not talk to a physician or advanced practice provider (APP) during the VirtualCare visit. Also, due to the demand nationwide, InTouch Health could not scale up their product to get a connection rate above 75%.

Clearly, we had to find another solution and once again, physician input was tremendously helpful with great ideas pouring into our IT team. One of our orthopaedic surgeons recommended Doximity, an online networking service for medical professionals. It featured a mobile app that was in beta version, making it a great option for 1:1 video calls. After testing Doximity, it is now accepted as the backup for connectivity issues between patients and physicians.

Telehealth Today

Ramping up telehealth so quickly and successfully was truly a team effort comprised of the IT department, frontline staff and physicians. While technical problem solving was addressed by the IT team, operational leaders assisted with solutions and implementation.

*Since the start of the pandemic,
Covenant HealthCare has accomplished
22,659 Virtual Visits
documented by 309 providers.*

Now, more than ever, patients are willing to try VirtualCare – patient encounters increased from two in February to 1,432 in March, 11,920 in April and 9,935 in May. Most feedback is very positive and while there are still some connectivity issues, patients are more forgiving and patient with the process. Equally important, physicians are also very accepting of VirtualCare as an important vehicle for keeping their patients healthy. There is no doubt that telehealth is here to stay. Next steps include leveraging this technology to hospitals in our Covenant Regional Thumb Network to ensure greater access to Covenant specialists.

I am so proud of the way Covenant, its leadership, physicians and staff continue to collaborate on solutions that deliver safe, alternative care for our patients. During this time of uncertainty, our culture certainly defined us, driving us all to make good decisions and take quick, effective actions that protect and promote community health. ■

“Last night, my brother transitioned from this life into the next life – a victim of the coronavirus. He died quietly and peacefully.

“We were a part of the sixth floor at Cooper with the virus situation and then with Covenant hospice. My niece and I have nothing but fantastic things to say about the way we were treated by the staff and the care my brother received during these very difficult times. Thanks to all of you for the support.”

– BROTHER OF COVID-19 PATIENT