



March 19, 2020

Dear Community Leader,

As I noted in my letter sent just a few days ago – and doesn't it seem in these challenging times that each day is a week and each week a year – hospitals across the world are working decisively to determine what actions can be taken so that we are prepared as possible for expected surges of coronavirus patients who will need inpatient hospital care. I wanted you to be among the first to know about an announcement we made this afternoon.

This is a complex process involving people, space, equipment and anticipatory skills, and some imagination about what might come to pass – given that there is no roadmap for this specific situation. But we do know what has happened in similar events in the past and currently in other countries.

For months, since the severity of the situation in China became apparent, we have been on a quiet, calm but utterly focused state of high alert. We have prudently and deliberately planned to make continual changes so that, absent a major surge of extremely ill patients within hours of each other, we can avoid or manage capacity issues. The first step to avoid surge crises is always to begin reducing utilization *before the surge occurs*. As the number of persons infected increases, we want to have the capacity to handle that demand. We begin with adapting space we have, and then look at ways to manage and then reduce inpatient volume so that we will have maximum capacity to accept new, more urgent cases.

We have already taken a number of steps to open up capacity in the advancement of the virus, beginning with specialized care for coronavirus patients. These include:

- We have adapted rooms to create new negative pressure units and are converting other rooms currently for negative pressure, an isolation technique to prevent contamination.
- By reconfiguring nursing units, opening up a closed unit to reactivate already licensed beds, and converting existing space and beds into patient care areas for intensive care, we plan to double our specialized capacity at ThedaCare Regional Medical Centers in Appleton and Neenah. We also have a phased list of additional steps we can and will be prepared to take if the surge continues, to add capacity as need grows.
- To ensure access to care and admission of appropriate patients, we are creating tented patient care areas at our hospitals to serve patients when the need arises.
- To look at reducing demand or shifting the care delivery process, we have worked with our physicians on assessing appropriate admissions, increased utilization of our telehealth program, developed an online symptom checker for people to be able to better navigate their care before they come in to be seen, and developed internal COVID-19 testing capability within ThedaCare so we are not solely reliant on the state for testing purposes.
- As a result of those actions, we expect our admissions to decline which will also ensure that we have maximum access to beds when the number of COVID-19 positive patients grows.

And we want you to be among the first to know that as the next natural extension of this effort to keep beds and services open for COVID-19 patients, today we announced that we will be postponing elective non-urgent procedures. Effective immediately we are asking physicians at our seven hospitals to postpone for at least six weeks all non-time sensitive, non-urgent elective surgeries, procedures, cardiac catheterizations and interventional radiology procedures that can be rescheduled without undue risk to the patient or the patient's medical condition. Each physician will carefully assess the patient's situation, and the final decision is, as always, up to the patient and physician. If it is felt that a surgery or procedure cannot wait, we will ensure that it is completed. Care teams are working directly with



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patients to change appointments as needed. Further, routine laboratory testing will be redirected out of the hospital. Urgent and emergent care needs will continue to be treated.

All of this will help us be at the best possible place to manage the anticipated surge of COVID-19 patients. We know that the people of this region understand why hospitals are preparing and why we are taking this step as a prudent management decision.

I want to assure you that our entire ThedaCare team, from senior executives to our physicians to our brave and dedicated front-line caregivers and our entire support staff, make one promise to you: We WILL take care of our community. We are prepared for whatever can be anticipated in this situation, and should the unanticipated occur, we have the right people and the planning abilities to adapt and keep going.

I also want to take a moment to recognize that many of you have stepped up and partnered with us in the community to provide services for our caregivers so they can continue to serve the community in this time. I can't thank you enough for your contributions. It does take a village.

If you have any questions or need help with information for yourself or people for whom you are responsible, please contact my office immediately and I or one of our team will help. We are not just your hospital; we are your lifelong partner in building a wonderful and healthy community.

With gratitude,

Imran A. Andrabi, MD
President and CEO

One additional very important additional note:

It is so important for everyone to realize that while there are factors beyond our control, **we can all have an impact on reducing a surge** with the simple guidelines that you have been hearing over and over, and we can determine the health and future of our community. Please follow and encourage others to follow what healthcare people keep repeating:

- Social distance. Six feet. Seriously.
- Wash hands – SOAP kills the virus germs.
- Sanitize your home.
- If you have symptoms CALL your doctor immediately and discuss whether you need testing.

Some things are beyond our control but together we can have an impact. Those simple guidelines can determine the health and future of our community.