March 31, 2020 UPDATES ON COVID-19

Bradford Regional Medical Center and Olean General Hospital today released the following updates and reminders regarding the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic:

CONFIRMED CASES – The Cattaraugus County Department of Healthy confirmed six positive COVID-19 cases. The McKean County Department of Health reported its first positive case over the weekend. The lack of testing kits throughout the U.S. continues to be an issue and therefore, the lack of confirmed cases probably isn’t a true measure of COVID-19 activity in our communities. Therefore, it is important for our patients and residents to practice social distancing, staying home unless necessary, practicing good hand hygiene, etc., to prevent the spread of this virus, according to William Mills, MD, vice president, quality and medical affairs, UAHS.

TRIAGE TENTS - Temporary tents were placed outside the emergency departments at Bradford Regional Medical Center and Olean General Hospital today. Once operational next week, the tents will be used to quick triage patients in an effort to unburden the hospitals’ emergency departments. The tents will not be used as COVID testing sites. “In anticipation of high patient surge, we are proactively erecting the tents outside the emergency departments to improve efficiency and better care for our patients,” Jeff Zewe, RN, president, chief executive officer, Upper Allegheny Health System, BRMC, OGH, said.

SUPPLY NEEDS – We have an adequate supply of ventilators for both hospitals for our current volumes. Like all hospitals nationwide, we are challenged relative to acquisition of PPE and are competing with hospitals worldwide. That said, we have an adequate supply of PPE for our current volume. We don’t however have a stockpile. We are asking staff to conserve PPE. If we burn through supplies, even before we see a surge, we risk being in real trouble should we start seeing a stream of new COVID-19 patients. We believe that in the coming days and weeks, inventories of PPE will become more available given the governor’s plan to centrally control and distribute PPE. We are awaiting a new supply of PPE including 1,000 locally made face shields, Jeff Zewe, RN, president, chief executive officer, UAHS, said.

SURGE PLAN – Reacting to New York state Gov. Cuomo’s call to expand hospital bed capacity statewide, our facilities staff has done an amazing job. New York state hospitals were asked to increase bed capacity in preparation for a patient surge by 50 percent. While no formal request was submitted by Pennsylvania, we decided to be proactive and plan for additional surge at BRMC as well.

Again, we are aware of the governor’s statements about cooperation between providers across the state. Yes, he suggested patients and/or staff could potentially move to and from hospitals across the state as the surge moves. However, at this point, we have received no directives nor have we received any information suggesting that patients will be coming to Olean from downstate. At this point, we continue to plan for surge to address local needs, according to Zewe.

TELEMED APPOINTMENTS – The hospitals’ primary care practices at Foothills Medical Group, Omega Family Medicine and Bradford Regional Medical Services are offering phone and telemedicine appointments to patients who prefer to
stay home during the pandemic. Patients interested in an alternative appointment should contact their primary care provider. Please note that not all appointments can be done via phone/telemedicine. Please contact your provider for more information. Offering this alternate way to see your provider is our response to support social distancing, Zewe said.

ON A POSITIVE NOTE – Our community has shown our hospitals a lot of love and kindness through this pandemic. Groups are making homemade face masks and donating PPE, people have had food delivered from area restaurants to our front line staff and local companies are producing face shields on 3-D printers.

COVID-19 RESPONSE FUND – The Olean General Hospital Foundation has established the COVID-19 Response Fund which will be used to directly support the front line staff as the hospital faces this pandemic. They are also accepting donations of PPE for hospital use. For more information, call the foundation at 716/375-7445.

STAY AT HOME - The New York and Pennsylvania governors have issued business and school closings in an effort to keep people at home. It really is an important step to help slow the spread of the illness. Medical staff are working tirelessly to prepare and care for patients. Taking preventative measures are vital to help healthcare facilities manage patient care during this pandemic. We know these restrictions can be emotionally and financially frustrating but it’s important to do your part to keep you, your family, your friends, and your neighbors safe and healthy.

TESTING - For testing information, please call your healthcare provider. DO NOT CALL THE HOSPITAL OR COME TO THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT OR PHYSICIAN OFFICE PRACTICES. Communications have been sent to healthcare providers regarding testing guidelines. Healthcare providers will need to determine whether or not the individual needs to be tested. If the healthcare provider approves someone for testing, the provider (not the individual) will contact the DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH. Finally, the individual will be notified by the DOH if he or she should be tested and/or quarantined at home.

VISITATION POLICY - OGH and BRMC have suspended all visitation at the hospitals and The Pavilion.

SCREENING UPON ENTRANCE – We continue to screen all individuals that enter our facilities. We started screening employees on March 23.

IF YOU ARE SICK - Avoid contact with others; stay home when you are sick. If you have a fever (100.4 degrees F/38 degrees C or higher), cough, or shortness of breath, call your healthcare provider and explain your symptoms. They will instruct you on how to proceed. If your symptoms are severe, such as difficulty breathing/shortness of breath, pain/pressure in the chest, please call the emergency room in advance. They will give you instructions on how to get care without exposing other people to your illness.

CORONAVIRUS PLANNING – Bradford Regional Medical Center and Olean General Hospital have established an organization-wide coronavirus steering committee and command center operation to address this pandemic. The group has been coordinating emergency preparedness, response efforts, as well as daily communication with state and county agencies. Those efforts continue around the clock in the health system.

Note: Olean General Hospital and Bradford Regional Medical Center will not share personal information about patients tested, treated or admitted for COVID-19 in order to protect their privacy as required by federal law.