

CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE FOR COVID-19 PATIENTS

Pacifica Nursing & Rehab Center is one of San Mateo County's skilled nursing facilities providing high-risk patients the highest-quality care

To reduce the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks in nursing homes, San Mateo County Health and HPSM have designated three nursing facilities as Centers of Excellence (COE). COE nursing facilities have demonstrated expertise in infection prevention, and specialize in post-acute care for patients with COVID-19.

COVID-19 has required health care providers to rapidly adapt to an uncertain new reality. In skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), where many hospital patients go to recuperate after discharge, patients are often older with chronic health problems. This makes them especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

To protect vulnerable nursing home residents from COVID-19, San Mateo County Health and HPSM support the best practice of “cohorting” patients within and between congregate care settings. This means safely grouping members at designated buildings, or within an area of a building, based on whether they are COVID-19 negative, positive, or unknown. Three nursing facilities have been designated as Centers of Excellence (COEs) for COVID-19 positive patients, based on their high quality of care and expertise: Pacifica Nursing & Rehab Center, St. Francis Convalescent Pavilion, and Seton Medical Center Skilled Nursing.

To earn COVID-19 COE status in San Mateo County, SNFs must have:

1. High quality ratings including Medicare Stars
2. Experience caring for patients with respiratory distress and related complications
3. Few long-term residents to relocate
4. Adequate bed capacity
5. Experienced operational and management teams

How do COEs help?

- If an outbreak occurs in a congregate care facility or nursing home and it isn't possible to isolate COVID-19 positive patients in place, these patients may be transferred to a COE temporarily.
- There, positive-status patients receive the highest quality care without the stress of going to an emergency room or being admitted to an acute care setting.
- By cohorting positive-status patients together, providers can reduce the risk of the virus spreading further within congregate care settings that are not equipped to isolate or are dealing with staff shortages.

Partners from San Mateo County Health ensure that COEs have everything they need to provide high-quality care while preventing the spread of COVID-19. That includes technical assistance, clinical training and material resources such as personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing kits.

Pacifica Nursing & Rehab Center – which has a five-star Medicare rating – had the experience, quality of care, and determination to become a COE. “It was a scary proposition to go all-in at a time when there were still so many unknowns,” admits Jacob Beaman, the Administrator of Pacifica Nursing & Rehab Center. “As an employee-owned company, it was a group decision: from executive management to housekeeping. It’s important that everyone is in this together as a team.”

Filipina Canta, RN, Pacifica’s Director of Nursing, notes that the nurses were hesitant at first to work with COVID-19 patients. “It’s just so different from what they’re used to,” says Canta. “We’ve had isolation rooms for communicable diseases before, but those were based on droplet precaution. COVID-19 raises separation to another level because the virus is capable of airborne aerosol transmission.”

Pacifica’s three-story building allowed them to dedicate their entire top floor to treating COVID-19 patients. This COVID-19 unit has 33 private bedrooms as well as its own entrance, sterile break/lunchroom and bathroom (with shower). Pacifica split their clinical and housekeeping staff into two groups – those who work on the third floor and everyone else. These groups never intermingle, protecting both staff and patients. To keep the air inside virus-free, the staff put significant effort into acquiring and then installing 20 hospital-grade negative-pressure hyper-HEPA-filter window units for air filtration. They also created new protocols to ensure routine deep cleaning of all touch surfaces with a newly purchased electrostatic sprayer. They offered hazard pay to eligible employees and free hotel rooms to staff who live with people who they might infect. These practices ensure that COVID-19 positive patients receive the best possible care, and that COVID-19 negative patients on other floors can be confident that the virus will not spread.

Since March, the San Mateo County Health team has been conducting training for staff in congregate care settings on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This includes instruction on how to safely put on and take off PPE, provide palliative care for patients with COVID symptoms, and monitor their condition to ensure they aren’t in danger. They also taught staff, including those at Pacifica, how to test patients for COVID-19. Pacifica conducts frequent testing of all residents and staff members.

“With the security precautions we put in place,” states Beaman, “staff is confident they can safely care for our patients and have embraced working in the COVID ward. In fact, many staff now prefer working in the COVID ward because what they’re doing is so important.”

The staff and patients also form deep connections during their time together. When a patient leaves for home, the mood is bittersweet. The staff lines up on either side of the exit, while maintaining social distance, cheering and clapping as they leave. “While we’re sad to say goodbye,” Beaman says, “It’s very touching to see patients fully recover from the virus and safely head back to their lives.”

About Health Plan of San Mateo

HPSM is a local, non-profit County Organized Health System (COHS) founded in 1987. HPSM's mission is to ensure that San Mateo County's vulnerable and underserved residents have access to high-quality care, services and supports so they can live the healthiest lives possible. With more than 130,000 members, HPSM serves all the County's Medi-Cal eligible residents, as well as families, seniors, people with disabilities and children with complex medical conditions who do not qualify for other health insurance. HPSM also has special programs that address eligible members' social determinants of health – from home-based health care to affordable housing for the homeless. Learn more at www.hpsm.org

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