



## **A Letter from Desert Care Network CEO Michele Finney to our Desert Communities**

March 30, 2020

During this very challenging time, I want you to know that the physicians, nurses and staff at Desert Regional Medical Center are here to care for you and your loved ones, if and when you need us.

We understand the widespread concern and uncertainty in our community as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. But you should feel reassured that our exceptional team of dedicated caregivers is ready and able to continue providing the higher level of care for which our hospital is known.

Desert Regional has a long-standing tradition of offering advanced care and comprehensive services, including life-saving trauma care, stroke services, neurosurgery, cardiac surgery, cancer treatment, and neonatal intensive care services. We're the only designated Level II trauma center – and we offer the only neonatal intensive care unit – in the Coachella Valley. We're also the region's comprehensive stroke center. We're used to treating some of the sickest and most critically injured patients throughout Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties.

During these difficult days, that commitment to our community remains unchanged.

Our most important priority is keeping our patients, physicians, and staff safe during the COVID-19 outbreak. Desert Care Network has collaborated with Riverside University Health System, Riverside County Public Health, Desert Healthcare District and others to provide Drive-Thru COVID-19 testing for over 1,200 symptomatic Coachella Valley residents over the past two weeks.

Similar to others, we have mobilized telehealth virtual visits and other tools such as an online assessment to ensure access to care. Although Desert Regional Medical Center is on restricted surgical scheduling as of April 1, the El Mirador Surgery Center and JFK Memorial Hospital remain available to meet those needs.

We are following guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Riverside County Public Health Officer, to identify, isolate, and treat any potential COVID-19 cases that may present at our hospital. We have created three dedicated units specifically for treating COVID-19 patients (plus a fourth unit coming online soon).

We routinely treat infectious diseases at Desert Regional and we have strong infection control policies, procedures, and systems in place to screen and treat patients. We have taken the appropriate steps, and we have trained professionals and the necessary equipment to react accordingly. For example, we have followed the CDC's recommendations and modified the air pressure in additional treatment rooms for aerosol-producing procedures so we can care for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients while making sure any viruses are expelled. We now have 114 beds in our negative pressure units and rooms, up from 11. Sixty of these beds are capable of handling critical care patients.

So far in the month of March, we have cared for 138 suspected COVID-19 patients, 100 of whom ultimately tested negative for the coronavirus. A total of 19 were positive for COVID-19, not all of whom required admission to the hospital. Several were treated on home quarantine. Nineteen tests are still pending.

If there is a surge in COVID-19 cases in our community, we have a detailed contingency plan to help address it. The plan includes expanding our current intensive care unit (ICU) capacity to as many as 75 beds and shifting some equipment such as patient monitors, telemetry boxes, and anesthesia machines from other areas in the system to help care for COVID-19 patients. If needed, we have the ability to convert unused space into to patient care areas by adding up to 47 medical-surgical beds in selected areas. Additionally, our emergency plan includes erecting up to 16 decontamination and surge tents and installing 230 treatment stations for patients. Surge plans are also in place for our other locations - JFK Memorial Hospital and Hi-Desert Medical Center.

Most important, we are fortunate to have engaged medical staff at our Desert Care Network hospitals who are fully committed to continuing to care for our community regardless of the challenges presented by the pandemic. Our physicians are supported by a talented and dedicated group of nurses and other caregivers, ready to serve those who need our help in the coming weeks and months.

I encourage you to stay safe at home and heed the direction of public health officials.

Together, we will get through this.

Sincerely,

Michele Finney