



From the Desk of Michele Kidd Sutton, FACHE

North Oaks Health System President/Chief Executive Officer

Please see the media release below. This advance is being provided to you to keep you informed of new developments within our health system. If you would like more information, please contact me at (985) 230-7700 or via email at zaffutom@northoaks.org.

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North Oaks Outlines COVID-19 Response Plan

[HAMMOND, La.] — “To respond to the COVID-19 global pandemic as declared by the World Health Organization, North Oaks Health System is implementing measures to minimize disease spread with the safety and well-being of the community at large as our utmost concern,” asserts Michele Sutton, president and chief executive officer. “This is a very fluid situation, and we view it as our responsibility to take a leading role in working with parish and local government officials, hospitals and health care providers, first responders and employers as a trusted partner and source of the most current information.”

To that end, a Coronavirus Summit was hosted by North Oaks March 11, for area officials. A panel of subject matter experts outlined COVID-19 facts and mitigation measures being implemented by the health system March 13, including:

- a triage system to evaluate and test patients with COVID-19 symptoms
- patient and visitor screenings
- patient masking
- limited hospital entry points
- visitation hours and visitor restrictions
- support of social distancing recommendations.

North Oaks will utilize a triage system to evaluate and test patients with COVID-19 symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath. Individuals with symptoms or concerns are asked to contact their primary care provider or call the North Oaks COVID-19/Coronavirus Screening Line at (985) 230-2778 for evaluation. The triage team will determine if individuals meet guidelines for testing based on travel to Europe, Asia or cruises, contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19/Coronavirus, and symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath. When criteria are met, cases will be escalated to a designated health care provider for further evaluation and/or testing via telemedicine, an in-person appointment at one of four designated North Oaks clinics, drive-thru testing in a secure setting or direct admission to North Oaks Medical Center.

Dr. Stacy Newman, the health system’s infectious disease specialist, notes, “Those requiring hospitalization are mostly the elderly or patients with underlying chronic health conditions. Most individuals with COVID-19 are able to self-isolate and recover at home. Medical care focuses on symptom management because there are no definitive medications available at this time to treat COVID-19.”

Pre-check-in greeting stations will be implemented at North Oaks hospitals, diagnostic centers and clinics to screen patients and visitors before entry. Patients with a cough will be required to mask for their safety. Symptomatic individuals will not be allowed to visit a hospitalized patient at North Oaks Medical Center or North Oaks Rehabilitation Hospital. Facetime, a phone call or e-Cards, which are available on the health system’s website at www.northoaks.org, will be suggested as alternatives to in-person visits.

For screening purposes, access to North Oaks Medical Center will be reduced to two entry points on weekdays and one on weekends. On weekdays, entry points will be: the main entrance on Paul Vega, M.D., Drive; and the emergency room on Jay Smith, M.D., Drive. On weekends, the emergency room will be the sole entry point. All other entrances to the hospital will be closed.

Hospital visiting hours will be 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. until further notice.

The number of visitors allowed for patients at North Oaks Medical Center and North Oaks Rehabilitation Hospital also will be restricted to one adult at a time. Visitors must be 18 years of age or older. Pediatric patients will be allowed to have both parents visit at the same time. For Neonatal Intensive Care Unit patients, only parents will be allowed to visit.

In support of social distancing, which health care officials recommend to help stop the spread of COVID-19, all tours, community classes, meetings, support groups and events booked on North Oaks campuses will be suspended for the next 30 days.

Likewise, all in-person volunteer activities at North Oaks facilities have been suspended for the next 30 days.

Dr. Robert Peltier, who is North Oaks' chief medical officer as well as an internal medicine and tropical medicine specialist, advises, "The best prevention against the spread of viruses like COVID-19 is to wash your hands frequently, avoid touching your face, cough into your elbow or a tissue that can be thrown away, and stay at home when you are sick."

"In keeping with our mission to improve lives, we are working closely with parish officials and our fellow community hospitals, Hood Memorial Hospital and Lallie Kemp Medical Center, in leading efforts to minimize and respond to the potential impact of this virus," Sutton asserts. "Our goal is to protect the health of our patients, workforce and the community, and do our part to minimize the spread of COVID-19."

"The community can rest assured that North Oaks' staff maintains a constant state of readiness to respond to emerging infections like COVID-19 should the need arise," confirms Peltier. "Preparations include year-round drills, education and training and the maintenance of supplies and equipment such as masks, ventilators and negative air pressure rooms. We take these precautions to best protect the health of our patients and staff."

For COVID-19 updates, visit the following websites:

- North Oaks Health System at www.northoaks.org/coronavirus
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov
- Louisiana Department of Health at www.ldh.la.gov
- Tangipahoa Parish Government at www.tangipahoa.org.

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