

Dear Families and Friends of the VVH,

Last weekend's pandemic-friendly vehicle parade was better than any pill for everyone's spirit at the Vets Home, residents and staff alike. It was a welcome respite from the isolation imposed by the coronavirus to see the outpouring of support. Thank you.

As we get closer to the peak which current models predict occurring in Vermont from mid-April to early May, we are still happy to report no cases among our residents. While this is likely to change due to the contagiousness of the coronavirus, we have taken increased efforts to reduce the risk of infection to our residents apart from those previously described in my earlier email:

- We have taken further measures to reduce the traffic between units. Your loved ones have been very tolerant of these measures. This includes redesigning the assignment of nurses, LNA's and activity staff. Every unit does have access to the outdoors still which, to my mind, is essential.
- Our respiratory unit is staffed with a small group of dedicated nurses and we are avoiding whenever possible changing assignments of nursing staff. We have refined our training in and the use of personal protective equipment.
- We have instituted "universal use" of surgical masks by all in the facility when on the resident units to lower the chance of a staff member passing the infection to a resident.
- We have been successful in obtaining some additional masks and gowns from the Vermont Emergency Operations Center which is critical since all staff in resident areas is now using surgical masks.
- We are planning to initiate universal face shield use as we accumulate more face shields over the next few days.
- Increased availability of coronavirus testing materials in Vermont is translating into an ability to test staff who have mild illness or contact with residents who might have COVID-19 to help identify those with mild or no symptoms. We continue to screen every staff member with a temperature and screening questions to keep help keep only healthy staff in the building.
- There is a mask called an N-95 which can filter smaller particles but requires medical clearance and fit testing prior to using it. We have acquired these masks and today received fit testing materials so we can start rolling this out.
- Our communication with the local hospital continues to be close with near daily contact with their infection control and medical team as we align our approach to COVID-19 with theirs. I can't speak highly enough of Southwestern Vermont Medical Center's generosity with their resources and expertise as we chart our way together through this ordeal.
- Similarly, I'm getting to know the team at the Vermont Department of Health quite well thanks to our telephone meetings aimed at fine tuning our management of this epidemic.

And finally, when I felt I could take a break for 45 minutes two days ago, I wandered the hallways with my guitar and enjoyed some spontaneous doorway singalongs due to the generosity of one of our residents who loaned me his guitar. I find sharing a moment of music with others to be very regenerative.

Keep those cards and letters coming. They are permanent, tangible reminders of the community supporting the VVH and our mission. And they can be reread limitless times.

Thank you for your trust in our care.

Peter King MD