

As more cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) continue to spread throughout the United States, health care leaders are jumping into action to help test patients and treat those affected.

At Katherine Shaw Bethea Hospital in Dixon, Ill., health care leaders knew they had to act quickly to create a rapid response plan. Their solution: drive-through testing for COVID-19.

Background

Katherine Shaw Bethea (KSB) Hospital is an 80-bed not-for-profit, independent healthcare provider located in Dixon, Illinois. Dixon is a city of about 15,700 and the county seat of Lee County with about 36,000.

KSB provides comprehensive ancillary services, including emergency medicine, obstetrics, inpatient psychiatry, a cardiovascular laboratory, outpatient surgery, inpatient surgery, and intensive care, among others. It also operates multiple clinics across the Sauk Valley.

Impact

KSB started their drive through screening for COVID-19 on March 16. To ensure smooth implementation, health care leaders pulled staff together for emergency preparedness planning. They decided to use their four-bay ambulance garage as the site for drive-through testing, which is now offered Monday through Friday

from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Patients must first arrange a pre-screening by phone or KSB's telehealth platform.

Lee County had not yet recorded a positive test for Novel Coronavirus, but KSB wanted to get in front of any surge. By raising awareness and communicating the availability of drive through testing, KSB believed they could practice social distancing and manage community spread.

KSB IT staff expanded and heightened visibility of its virtual care page on its website. In addition, KSB promoted drive through screening via social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) using videos to explain the need and process.



Using the KSB telehealth platform "KSB Care Anywhere," a patient will answer a series of questions. They have received 70 calls in the first 48 hours of screening. If potentially symptomatic, then the patient will be instructed to proceed to the drive through.

For the onsite testing, patients enter at the street level, receive swab testing, and exit through the underground parking garage. Health care workers are being instructed to reserve clinical testing for people meeting federal guidelines related to symptoms and potential exposure to infected individuals.

Lessons Learned

Here are their top takeaways gleaned from their first week offering drive-through screenings:

1. Know CDC's guidelines backward and forward.

Knowing the latest guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was key for nurses at KSB, said Linda Clemen, R.N., KSB's chief nursing officer. "Our staff was very intent on following CDC guidelines in order to best protect our patients and community," she said.

To prepare for the drive-through testing and interaction with potential COVID-19 patients, KSB health care leaders helped orient staff with the patient questionnaire, practiced scenarios and threw in some curveballs (traps included role-playing a patient more than 75 miles away seeking care, and a member of the medical staff demanding testing for himself – both against CDC guidelines).

This role-playing type training helped nurses think quickly on their feet and retain the latest CDC guidance. Clemen also stressed the importance of choosing nurses who are stringent in following CDC guidance and who are willing to jump in quickly as opposed to assigning/repurposing other medical professionals just to fill spots. In addition, she emphasized the need to choose staff who can communicate clearly and calmly with patients in any scenario.

2. Don't seek perfection; patients need help quickly.

KSB staff first gathered together at 8:15 a.m. Monday morning and launched the drive-through testing at noon. Recognizing that this wasn't a drill or something they could train for at a leisurely pace, Clemen said staff quickly adopted the mentality of, "We're doing this for our community and we have to figure out a way to do this, starting at noon."

Staff took ownership of the initiative, settling into the emergency department to work out the details, write a narrative, and then drew it on a flow chart following an algorithm all staff could follow.

CEO Dave Schreiner said that staff assumed operations would not be perfect and that that was

okay. "We knew we were going to make mistakes, not at the cost of patient safety, but in operations, and we knew we'd figure things out as we went along," Schreiner said. "You miss the good if you wait till it's perfect."

3. Seek out community partners who can augment your testing efforts.

KSB took care of the testing. But the delivery of test results to patients was handled by the health departments of Lee County and Whiteside County. This was the best collective use of resources and capacity, ensuring alignment between different community agencies.

While KSB receives the results, the county health department contacted the patient to review after-care protocol. "We learned early on that if you're going to incorporate a county health department into your algorithm for treatment, make sure they know that and that they are doing what you think they are doing," Clemen said.

In an effort to provide the most seamless patient experience, KSB now meets daily with a task force of health care stakeholders, including both counties' health departments, to ensure they are in alignment

with giving patients the same clinical information and instructions. The goal, according to Clemen: "Make sure to set the patient up for success."



Future Goals

As hospital and health systems leaders nationwide face hardships during these challenging times, many are reaching out to each other for support, advice and ideas. "We're receiving calls from many of our colleagues around the area," Clemen echoed. "We're sending each other our plans, algorithms, whatever could help them."

During the hard times, Schreiner said that he is proud to have a high-quality staff assembled to care for patients and that he is impressed by his team's fast action. "These are the people running into the burning building," he said. "Talk about having the courage to do what we're all being asked to do."