Governor Walz Announces First Alternative Care Site to Help Relieve COVID-19 Hospital Capacity

Today, Governor Tim Walz announced the first skilled-nursing facility to serve
as an alternative care site as part of his action plan to relieve hospitals overwhelmed by those requiring COVID-19 care.

Beginning Tuesday, Benedictine St. Gertrude's in Shakopee will accept up to 30 patients from area hospitals, providing transitional care and allowing hospitals to treat those sick with COVID-19 and others requiring emergency support.

Hospitals report that a number of their beds are occupied by Minnesotans who should be treated at long-term care facilities, such as those who have recently had surgery and no longer need hospital-level care but cannot yet go home. Due to staffing and bed shortages, hospitals are not able to transfer these patients to long-term care settings. Governor Walz's action plan, announced October 15, is designed to help hospitals manage capacity issues by expanding access to long-term care beds.

Initially, eight nurses and four certified nursing assistants at the alternative care site will form the COVID-19 Emergency Staffing Pool, which Governor Walz expanded in mid-October as part of his action plan to increase hospital capacity for COVID-19 patients. Additional temporary nursing assistants will come from the Minnesota National Guard.

"This is an all-hands-on-deck moment for our hospitals. We are answering the call from Minnesota's doctors and nurses, who are asking for support and relief as they treat critically ill COVID-19 patients," said Governor Walz. "Our action plan is aimed at easing the burden on Minnesota hospitals, providing more capacity for Minnesotans who are sick with COVID-19, and ensuring all patients are receiving the care that is right for them. There is more work to be done, but today is an important step."

"We are working hard to implement creative and effective solutions so our hospitals can treat patients who need help the most," said Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. "Our health care heroes need our support as they make sure every Minnesotan has access to critical, lifesaving care."

"At the heart of Benedictine's Mission is serving those in need and this opportunity is a unique way to fulfill our Mission," said Benedictine President and CEO Jerry Carley. "With the staffing support from the National Guard and the COVID-19 emergency staffing pool, Benedictine St. Gertrude's is able to use its available capacity to serve this need."

To ensure adequate hospital capacity for COVID-19 patients, Governor Walz took a series of steps in October to free up space at long-term care facilities, including expanding the Emergency Staffing Pool so that short-term emergency temporary staff could be used to open

up additional beds for patients ready to be discharged from a hospital; putting the National Guard on notice to provide staffing support at decompression facilities; and directing the

Department of Human Services to free up capacity at state-operated long-term care facilities.

The Department of Human Services increased admissions to state-operated facilities by 17% over the last three weeks. Along with the decompression sites, this critical step will enable hospitals to appropriately refer and admit patients who have complex behavioral needs that require specialty care, so the acute care hospitals can treat more COVID-19 patients and provide appropriate care for more Minnesotans.

The Administration received proposals from multiple nursing facilities around the state willing to receive patients from hospitals once additional staffing is provided, either through the COVID-19 Emergency Staffing Pool or the deployment of the National Guard. The Minnesota Department of Health and DHS are continuing to work to determine sites best suited for this program.