

SAINT THERESE MEDIA STATEMENT

April 29, 2020

As you all know, the Saint Therese New Hope community has been through an ordeal since our first resident tested positive for the coronavirus on April 5. In fact, our efforts to prevent the spread of the virus started a month earlier, when we shut down the 258-bed skilled nursing facility to visitors, vendors and partners.

During that time we have kept in touch with residents, families, guardians and physicians about changes in residents' health status. We have also been in very close touch with the Minnesota Health Department (MDH), which assigned us an infection control specialist and audited us twice since March 31. We received reports of no-deficiency – one written and one oral – following these audits, meaning we were found in compliance with our license.

We have now tested 100 percent of our residents for presence of the coronavirus and expect results on the final 25 in the next few days. We have had 130 residents test positive since we began testing at the end of March, when tests became available. Within the results we've seen, roughly one-third of the positive cases were asymptomatic, meaning they were living to that point with their roommate and among others in a potentially contagious state, unbeknownst to them or anyone else.

Identification of so many cases, symptomatic and otherwise, created a massive room transfer challenge for us. Per CDC and MDH we moved all virus-positive residents together into unit and wing cohorts to prevent infection of others and to conserve personal protective equipment for our staff. Sixty-five members of our staff have exhibited symptoms or have been exposed including 50 caregivers. All were sent home on quarantine until they recovered and were cleared to return, per MDH and CDC guidelines.

A second piece of summary data is very hard to report, which is that we have lost 47 residents to COVID-19, including the first two deaths on April 6. As we have stated to each of you, and to the media, this has been devastating to a community that prides itself on providing quality, loving care.

To put the number in context, it's necessary to know some background information. Whenever a resident's condition changes, the resident's team explores whether there is a desire to change the treatment options, including the common advance directive Do Not Resuscitate/Do Not Intubate (DNR/DNI). Even after learning that their loved one tested positive, most maintained their existing treatment plans while other adopted advance directives. That is in part why only a handful of our residents were hospitalized. Only one family asked to move their relative from the facility after hearing of a positive test.

COVID-19 is an insidious disease, spreading readily in close quarters such as Saint Therese New Hope, which has two residents per room and four sharing a bathroom. Residents are often frail, some with dementia. Their care is challenging in optimal conditions, which these were not. The disease doesn't behave like influenza, which can be treated prophylactically and its spread more obvious and readily confined. Now that everyone has been tested for coronavirus, separation of those testing positive and negative – the first and most effective line of defense – will be much easier to accomplish.

One more point to address is the implication in some media reports that this situation was hidden or that care standards were substandard. That is untrue and unfair. Families, guardians and responsible physicians were informed as soon as positive test results were received and were advised of the massive movements within our building. And, following our long tradition, we have continued to honor our lost residents with a funeral procession out the front door, serenaded with song and prayer by our staff. Our grief is out in the open, as are our losses.