Takeaways from MHA Webinar:

Insights from the Frontlines of Washington State During COVID-19:
A Discussion with Mary Shepler of EvergreenHealth | April 16, 2020

Overview

EvergreenHealth, based in Kirkland, Washington, was truly at the front of the frontlines, as the first health system in the country to treat COIVD-19 patients. Now as Washington state is moving past its COVID-19 surge , Mary Shepler, Chief Nursing Officer of EvergreenHealth, shared her experiences, plan of action and lessons learned in supporting staff, the importance of leadership, transparency of communication and considerations for the resumption of business under a new normal world.

Plan of Action:

Creation of COVID-19 Dashboard. They developed and implemented a dashboard to report the number of COVID-19 patients, tests, deaths, discharges and more. The dashboard has become a critical part of Evergreen's daily operations.

Space Expansion. Evergreen cohorted and expanded units to accommodate COVID-19 patients and assigned 120 beds in the ICU to COVID-19 patients, maintaining approximately 90 of them.

Staff and WorkFlow. They recruited crisis nurses for 2-4 week contract periods. They are trying to keep their nurse-to-patient ratios up. Additionally, PACU and OR staff are being reallocated to support the ICU. As their surge passes, Evergreen is slowly reducing the number of crisis nurses. They have stopped bedside shift reports due to PPE restrictions and have been holding staff huddles in two separate rooms. Evergreen also sends exhausted staff home and has recruited more social workers to help address the emotional load on caregivers. To mitigate burnout, they rotate leadership , and ask that leadership only work in 12 hour shifts and rotate weekends to minimize burnout and model good behavior.   While they have did not have Code Lavender place, they now understand the need.

Visitors. Evergreen has been more liberal on visitor policies than many other hospitals. At the maternity center, they have limited rooms to the patient and two consistent support persons. The children's hospital implemented a two adult per visit policy. General visitation has been discouraged, and they are leveraging technology-based virtual visits through July. They are allowing one person to enter the ICU for end of life cases, yet are still experiencing the difficult issues of individuals dying alone. Many laptops and tablets were donated to Evergreen and they have found they help with patient loneliness, which is considerable. They have eliminated all volunteers for the time being. Some volunteers have joined their health system's sewing bee, assisting with the shortage of surgical masks.

Internal and External Communication. In terms of external communication, Evergreen has consultants to lead the way in communications with the media. They hold weekly meetings with the Union and share all employee communications with them. Internal communication has been facilitated through virtual town halls and all staff emails. They urge that transparency in communication is critical both internally and externally.

Additional Considerations

Post-Acute Care. This remains their biggest challenge as they have a hard time discharging patients to post-acute care as SNFs require two negative tests in order to take patients back. At discharge, they often send PPE along with the patient to support the needs of the post-acute care facility. They are still monitoring many nursing homes that have a large number of positive cases.

Resumption of Business. They meet twice a week to discuss plans for the resumption of business, focusing on how to slowly ramp up backlogged surgeries and reactivate patient experience best practices. They are hopeful that toward the end of May, they may be able to start to ramp up a resumption of business under a new normal environment.

Parting Advice: Plan for the worst and take it slow when considering business resumption.

Contact Information

If you have further questions, Mary Shepler kindly offered to share her email address: MShepler@evergreenhealthcare.org