

Miyamura gym completes transition to COVID-19 field hospital

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 08 May 2020 05:36



As the country deals with the influx of COVID-19 patients, hospitals have had to find ways to house the patients to receive proper medical care by setting up temporary field hospitals. As of April 28, McKinley County is the hardest hit county in New Mexico with 820 positive tests.

Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services and Gallup Indian Medical Center have cooperated with the United States Army Corps of Engineers to transform the gymnasium at Miyamura High School into just such a center.

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The field hospital is described as a safe and comfortable setting where COVID-19 patients can be isolated and monitored during the pandemic, according to the Gallup Alternate Care Facility Leadership Team and the New Mexico Department of Health.

The facility set-up was completed ahead of schedule after about two weeks, which was a point of praise for numerous people.

David Morgan, director of facilities management for the New Mexico Department of Health, praised the efforts of the community for the hospital.

“At a time like this where we all come together and we put in the necessary help, there’s a great sense of accomplishment between all the communities that we work with,” Morgan said April 24.

The facility has 60 cubicles for patients and is equipped with negative pressure ventilation and an air-conditioner. It will be used to house patients from GIMC and RMCHCS who are too sick to stay home or who no longer need to be on a ventilator, but still need oxygen and medical care.

In addition to patient transfer, the two hospitals will also split management duties, with Dr. Kevin Gaines, of GIMC, and Dr. Valory Wangler, of RMCHCS, running the facility. The facility will be staffed by health care workers from both hospitals, as well as members from the University of New Mexico’s Environment Health Core and volunteers.

Work on the facility was completed April 19, and it began accepting patients April 25. Ina Burmeister, chief development officer for RMCHCS, said she did not have an official count of admissions as of April 29.

She did, however, say admittance is off to a “slow start.”

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Most of the building's cost was covered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, with the State of New Mexico contributing as well. Burmeister did not have an estimate for how much the facility cost to set up.

As for supplies, Burmeister said the hospital is receiving personal protective equipment from the state, but this is another area where exact amounts were not given.

"There is a request for donations for items that are not going to be covered by the state," Burmeister said.

These items were listed on the field hospital's community website, which is <https://acfmiamura.wordpress.com/>

The list includes:

Two "smart" televisions for "rec" stations

Shower slippers / flip flops

Rubber squeegee for shower floors to clean between showers, 3 or 4

Padlocks for patient lockers x 60

A night-stand or fold-out TV trays for patients to rest items on, including cell-phone, dinner tray, picture of family, etc. – as many as 58

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Command wall hooks for patients to hang towels, etc. on in their room

Cell phone chargers for new models

The hospital is also requesting two U.S. General 26 in. x 22 in. single bank red roller cabinets to be used as medication cabinets. Donations can be dropped off at First United Methodist Church Monday through Thursday from 8:30 - 11:30 am.

As for how long the field hospital will stay open, Burmeister said she doesn't know.

"It's going to operate until we don't need it anymore," she said. "So it's hard to put a time frame on it."

Navajo Nation Vice President Myron Lizer said they hope not to have to use the facility for long, but that the people who will be stationed and working there deserve credit.

"All of you health care workers who have committed yourselves to this project: that is true love," he said.

By Cody Begaye
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