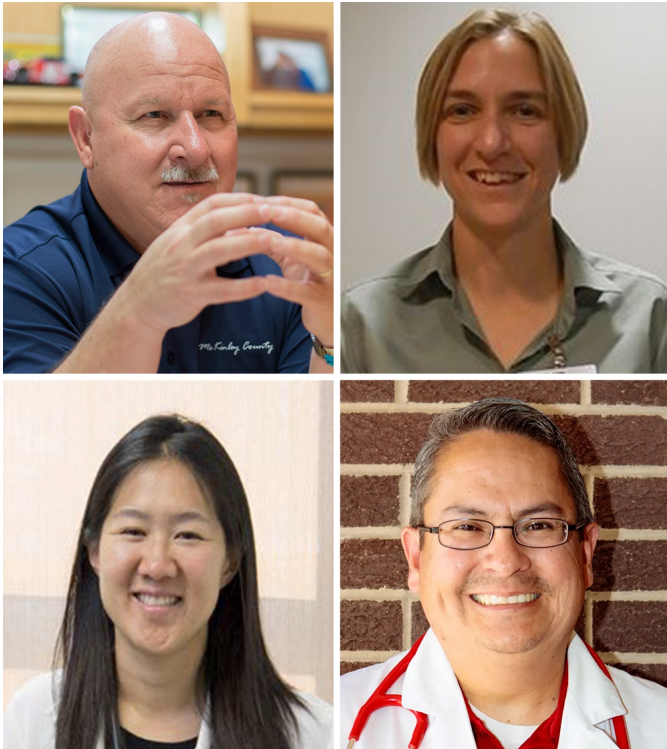


The Doctors' Perspective

Written by By Dominic Aragon Sun Correspondent
Friday, 08 May 2020 05:40



GALLUP - Medical doctors from the Gallup-McKinley County area met virtually with Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce CEO Bill Lee April 28 to address local concerns surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The session, called “COVID-19: The Local Doctors’ Perspective,” was hosted on Zoom, an online conference meeting space, and broadcast on Facebook live.

Lee moderated the one-hour question-and-answer event, asking the doctors COVID-19-related questions.

The doctors in attendance were Dr. Jennie Wei from the Gallup Indian Medical Center, Dr. Valory Wangler of Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services and Dr. Lawrence Andrade of Family Medicine Associates.

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The public and media in attendance were invited to ask questions.

As of April 28, New Mexico had 2,974 cases of the virus with McKinley County leading all counties in the state with 820 cases.

The doctors warned the respiratory health of COVID-19 positive individuals can deteriorate rapidly.

"This is exactly what we had anticipated, given that there was a huge spike in positive tests a week or two ago," Wei said. "What we are seeing now are the people who have now gotten tested a week or two ago, that are getting really, really sick."

Patients are having to be transported to Albuquerque, because there are not enough intensive-care beds in Gallup.

Lee and the doctors discussed how the coronavirus does not respect borders and does not discriminate on who it infects.

"I just can't stress enough social distancing," Andrade said. "If we could just follow social distancing, we could be flattening the curve and resuming some of our normal activities like some of the cities are doing, but we're just exploding and it's pretty sad right now."

Maintaining the six-foot social distancing and hand-washing frequently will help, Andrade said.

Andrade told the *Gallup Sun* the forum appeared to be a one-time event at this time. But said he is open to doing it again if he is asked to participate.

Dr. Wangler has had her personal battle with the virus.

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"I, myself, tested positive about a week ago," Wangler said. "I've been very fortunate that I have not been one of the people that's gotten terribly sick, but it's a scary thing."

The doctors all recommend that people wear masks when going out in public and all support a possible ordinance within the Gallup city limits that would require face coverings.

The doctors also said it is hard to definitively say how long the virus can survive on various surfaces, as studies are ongoing.

"There are so many factors," Wangler said. "The other piece that's challenging to know is how long it can be active in an individual. There have been cases that have shown people continuing to have some viral components several weeks out from their infection."

Communities have been hurt economically during the pandemic across our state and country.

The doctors said we need to use caution and take cues from other communities as they open, to determine when our area can reopen.

"We risk human life," Wangler said when talking about the possibility of reopening the community early. "We put our most vulnerable members of our community at really substantial risk."

The topic of pets and possibly contracting COVID-19 from them came up. How do we keep our animals and ourselves safe?

Wangler added she has not seen "evidence of transmission through our pets."

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"I haven't heard a thing yet," Andrade said of contracting the virus from an animal.

If you think you may have COVID-19, or the symptoms of the virus, the doctors recommend getting tested.

Essential workers, people who come into contact with a positive person, and people exhibiting symptoms are eligible for the drive-up testing on College Drive, behind the pediatrics clinic.

"It is an uncomfortable swab that goes in your nose straight back to all those areas in your nasopharynx," Wangler warned.

The doctors say they are seeing people recover, and wish the positive stories would get more attention.

"Assume you have it. Assume everybody has it. Because that really helps us attend to the masking, attend the social distancing," Wangler said. "Not everybody has it...But if you go into it with that mindset that 'I could be infected,' I think that really helps you remember to attend to those things and keep everybody safe."

By Dominic Aragon
Sun Correspondent