

Covid care site closes

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 26 June 2020 07:54



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Local hospitals can handle current caseload

The Gallup Alternate Care Facility at the Miyamura High School gym closed down in a ceremony held by staff from Gallup Indian Medical Center and Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services June 17.

The facility was established in April as an overflow site for patients recovering from COVID-19 at GIMC and RMCHCS. The reason for the closing is the need for hospital beds for COVID patients at the two hospitals has decreased to the point where they are able to provide the necessary care for patients.

Major General Jeffrey Clark of the U.S. Army Medical Command spoke about how the two hospitals collaborated to run the facility, along with the New Mexico Medical Reserve Corps.

The Medical Reserve Corps also helped staff medical surgical units at the two hospitals and helped monitor more than 140 people in the motel program for COVID positive unsheltered people.

“The Rehoboth hospital and GIMC [staff] were working as one team to take care of patients, and the Army National Guard was absolutely critical in this endeavor,” Clark said.

It took about three weeks for the idea of the facility to come to fruition, and the Army Corps of Engineers spent 12 days to convert the gym to house overflow COVID patients. The first admission was on April 25.

The Gallup site served 36 patients in the two months it was active. Between April and May, both hospitals transported more than 300 patients to Albuquerque for intensive care.

Clark recited a passage from the poem *To be of use* by Marge Piercy, which he thinks applies to the use of the facility and the people who ran it:

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“The people I love the best

jump into work head first

without dallying in the shallows

and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.”

“This ACF and the response of this community speaks to something that’s inside each of us that wants to be part of something bigger than ourselves,” Clark said.

Mayor Louis Bonaguidi was present and recalled how the site was established in light of a sharp rise in positive cases in the area in the early part of April.

“That’s when we realized McKinley County and the City of Gallup was in deep trouble,” he said. “The virus numbers were outrageous and it was getting the better end of it.”

However, coming to this point after collaboration with multiple parties was exciting for Bonaguidi, especially after the city took drastic measures.

“We blocked off the city. We were the only city in the United States to use the Riot Act, so we got national publicity for that,” Bonaguidi said.

The mayor also spoke to the efforts of the community to combat the spread and how they have followed the rules in place to lead to this point.

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“This community really came together. It’s impressive when you go to Walmart now and you see everyone wearing masks. We came together, and our numbers are going down,” Bonaguidi said.

Sanjay Choudhrie, who became known as incident commander for the facility, thanked all of the staff for their efforts. In addition to Clark, other staff who provided leadership for the site include George Morgan, who helped set up security, custodians, and supplies for the site; Kevin Gaines, M.D., and Valory Wangler, M.D.

The staff also thanked people who volunteered their time and brought supplies, personal protective equipment, and worked in the ward at the site.

“We were able to be properly equipped to take care of our staff and deliver quality care to patients [because of them],” Choudhrie said.

While the facility may be closing down, the staff reminds people this does not mean the pandemic is over, and people still need to wear masks and maintain physical distances in social situations and continue to practice effective hand washing and not going out when it is not necessary.

For information about what comes next for the Hiroshi Miyamura High School Gym see: *Getting the gym back in shape*

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By Cody Begaye
Sun Correspondent