

HCR continues visits to its 600 North Country patients

HCR Continues Patient Visits

PLATTSBURGH — HCR Home Care offers at-home care to some 600 North Country residents and, amid growing COVID-19 concerns, its workers were still showing up for patients. Chief Clinical Officer and Administrator Laura Martini said that had led to some stress for the home care agency's 70 upstate employees. "Even beyond the new policies and protocols," Martini said. "They have families, they have kids at home, there are anxieties that anyone in the healthcare field has. They're thinking, 'What if I bring this home?'"

'A WIDE FOOTPRINT'

As a certified and licensed agency, HCR Home Care offers services to multiple counties throughout the upstate region. Its Plattsburgh office, located on the U.S. Oval in the City of Plattsburgh, covered Clinton, Essex, Franklin and St. Lawrence counties, while its Hudson Valley office took care of the Warren, Washington and Hamilton counties. The agency provides at-home medical care in the form of nursing services, social work and home-health aids, as well as physical, occupational and speech therapies. "We have a wide footprint," Martini said.

THE PATIENTS

Patients to receive at-home care were typically older or had multiple different medical problems, or co morbidity, Martini said. "Those two factors alone would make those types of people considered vulnerable for COVID-19," she said. In addition to aiding many individuals with compromised immune systems, Martini said HCR played a role in the area's confirmed cases of the novel virus. "We are able to transition those patients out of the hospital and back to home," Martini said, "even with the COVID-19 positive."

SCREENING EVERYONE

HCR had enacted protocols in line with federal Center for Disease Control Prevention guidelines, which, Martini said, seemed to be updated on a daily basis. And, she added, HCR had been conducting screenings. "All of our field staff have a responsibility to call into their manager every morning to let them know that they don't have a fever or any respiratory symptoms that could be connected to COVID-19," Martini said. "On top of that, before we send any staff into a patient's home, we do a patient screening before arrival," she continued. "It's really a way for us to protect the patients from any staff symptoms, and it's a way to protect our staff from any patient symptoms"

CHECKING IN

To help allay workforce fears, Martini said the agency now does weekly town hall webinars with its employees, as well as doctors and other officials. "We have open dialogue about some of the education, but also their concerns," she said. "It has been very well received. We have a group of people who work remotely, they're out in the community. They're not coming into an office environment every day where they can have that type of support from their coworkers," she continued. "It has been a really great way to connect people."

NOT EXPERIENCING SHORTAGE

During this pandemic, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo has enacted "Matilda's Law." "What that means for home care agencies is that any of our home visit staff will wear masks," Martini said. "So that's 100 percent of our staff on 100 percent of the home visits that they do." Martini said the North Country's 70 workers each averaged one to two masks per day and, through daily New York State Department of Health surveys, equipment was being allocated to each county. "I'm very happy to say that in Clinton County we've been able to secure additional supplies through the Office of Emergency Management," Martini said. "We're not experiencing a shortage in that area."

ACCEPTING HOMEMADE MASKS

Though the agency needed to wear N95 face masks to follow CDC guidelines, Martini said they had use for masks being made by the region's sewists. "They are not considered personal protective equipment, however, the way that they can be used is to wear over a surgical mask to prolong its life," she said. "For the purposes of doing that, we are accepting them."