



Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health

COVID-19 Public Briefing: Tuesday, September 1, 2020

Transcribed from a previously recorded live event.

Mr. Meyers: Good morning. I am Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health. This is our Coronavirus update for Tuesday, September 1<sup>st</sup>. Beginning with some numbers, the count in the state of Texas is now well over 600,000 confirmed cases; 12,536 deaths to date. In Midland County, 3,272 confirmed cases and 69 deaths so far through the life of the pandemic. In our hospital, we have 181 census today. Twelve patients who are confirmed with COVID. Three of those on our dedicated Critical Care Unit. All of those patients are in their 60s and all of them are on ventilators. Nine on the Medical Surgical Unit. Those age ranges go from the 30s to the 70s. Within that patient census here at the hospital, there are 5 patients who came to us from either the Ashton Medical Lodge or the Midland Medical Lodge. Ten of our twelve patients are Midland County residents. The other 2 are from outside of the community. As I said we have 3 COVID patients on ventilators, a total of 6 ventilators in use. So, plenty of ventilator capacity remains available. 133 patients seen in our Emergency Department (ED) yesterday. Just a continuing point of emphasis that we do want people to know that it is safe and really very efficient right now to come to the ED really if you have any kind of emergency condition you are welcome and safe to come and take advantage of the services we have to offer to care for your emergency condition. And we would encourage you not to ignore things like chest pain or signs and symptoms of a stroke or injuries that may be severe. Please do come and visit the ER and you'll see that volumes are down and turn around times are pretty fast these days.

With regard to testing, we have lots of testing availability now. We have had good luck getting test kits and capacity in place. We have recently, while we reduced hours at our West Campus and Coleman Clinic drive through sites, we have expanded the indications for testing to include people who have had a recent exposure. So, if you're having symptoms of COVID-19, if you've had a recent exposure, please call 68NURSE. We'll get you an appointment and get you tested promptly. Remember, at both those sites we are now doing the rapid turn around test, antigen test and you're getting results there within an hour of your arrival. So, if you need a test, if you've been exposed, if you have symptoms please do call 68NURSE and we will get you in right away. Testing recently has been up and down. For several weeks we had had a declining trend in the total demand for testing. Last week, the numbers popped back up some at least in terms of total demand probably because we were beginning to emphasize the need for exposed patients to come on in and get tested. But interestingly as the demand for testing and the numbers went back up, the percentage of those that were positive went down. We were down to 9.5% positive out of right at 500 tests that we did last week. So, those numbers are encouraging, but we continue to encourage people to come on in and get tested if you need it.

In the hospital as of yesterday, we've reduced the dedicated beds. We were at 30 medical beds dedicated to COVID patients and we are now down to 20. We certainly have the ability to pop that back up if the numbers indicate it, but our census has been at a considerably lower number for several days now and so we did finally feel comfortable reducing the complement of dedicated beds from 30 to 20. In Critical Care, it's a little looser. We had 12 beds dedicated. We have 6 now that are fully dedicated, but another 6 that could easily be put back into service for COVID patients as needed. So, we have reduced the complement of fully dedicated beds. There's a couple of reasons for that, but the biggest



one is that there is an increasing demand for those beds from non-COVID patients. We want to be sure that we can care for people with all kinds of injuries and illnesses that come to us in need. And especially in this time as COVID begins to decline.

Looking at our workforce, we've had more encouraging numbers it seems like every day, certainly every week. We are down to a total of only 8 employees being quarantined. Seven of those eight are positive for the COVID virus, but only 8 who are being asked to stay home until they recover, so our workforce is in much better shape than it was in the worst of the pandemic.

We have been discussing visitation a good bit. We, to begin with, don't have authorization from the state to change the visitation guidelines. Those emergency rules were extended and should be in place, as we understand the state's regulatory process, into the first week of October. So, the current rules are still in place from the state's perspective. What we have been doing is talking a good bit about interpretation of those rules. We are particularly concerned that family members, visitors, people who can help to speak for patients have access to those sickest patients. So, we are beginning to tweak those rules just a little bit to make sure that the sickest patients we are caring for their families have the ability to visit and to assist them through their stay, including some COVID patients. So, as this next week unfolds, we expect to be clarifying those guidelines, loosening the visitation, our interpretation of the state's visitation requirements just a little bit to make sure that our sickest patients can have someone with them when they need it. I don't anticipate changing the rules for visitors for outpatients or for our healthier non-COVID patients throughout the hospital probably for at least another month and we'll keep our eyes on that and know there are advocacy organizations throughout our industry that have been in dialog with the governor about how to properly balance the need to manage our healthcare environments and minimize COVID exposure, while at the same time recognizing that patients and their families need that interaction, especially in their times of health crisis and striking the right balance is important to all of us in the industry and I know it's important to the state and to the governor's office. So, those conversations will continue and probably in another month or so we'll see some meaningful change in visiting guidelines. But just a little bit of tweaking happening here next week, and we'll have details for you the next time we talk.

I believe that's all that I have in terms of prepared remarks today. It's been relatively quiet. I hate to say that out loud, but that's where we are now. So, I'm happy to take questions if you have any.

Tasa Richardson, Midland Health Public Relations Manager: Well, it's relatively quiet on the question front as well. We'll give a few minutes for the media. Please use the chat function or raise a hand function and then if you're following us on Facebook, please submit your questions on our Facebook feed.

Alright, it looks like you've summed it up very well. We have no further questions.

Mr. Meyers: Well, I'll close by reminding people that we have a holiday weekend coming up. Labor Day is next Monday, so this is one of those high risk times when people have a tendency to let down their guard, are more likely to gather in groups, less likely to respect social distancing, and keep their masks on, and wash their hands carefully, and all the things we've been advising people to do from the very beginning. So, please accept this as a reminder that the COVID virus isn't gone. The crisis is not over. We do seem to be in a decline and we'd certainly like to keep the numbers headed down. So, don't forget the things that have gotten us to this point: wearing a mask, social distancing, avoiding crowds



especially indoors, or minimizing any contact you have with multiple people for any length of time, if you are going to be gathering outside spread out, wear your mask as much as you can, avoid crowds even outside, stay in well ventilated spaces, and be particularly mindful of exposure to the elderly or to populations who have chronic disease. Those are the people who remain the most vulnerable to this virus and we need to pay the most attention to their care and wellbeing. So, schools are starting again slowly, the holidays coming up a couple of high-risk points are still ahead of us, but we do feel positive about where we are, and we'll be back with you next week. In all likelihood that will be Tuesday morning again and we'll brief you with what's happened over the holiday weekend at that time. Thank you.