**Local Healthcare System Discusses COVID-19 Preparedness and
Community Health**

On Thursday, March 12th, healthcare representatives from Hidalgo Medical Services, Silver Health Care, Gila Regional Medical Center, Cassie Health Center, Fort Bayard Medical Center, and Hidalgo County Detention Center, came together to discuss the Coronavirus (COVID-19) that is spreading across the U.S., and as of this week, has entered New Mexico. The purpose of the meeting was to ensure open lines of communication regarding potential future cases in our community, discuss CDC, and New Mexico Department of Health recommendations for care delivery and testing, and to ensure effective and aligned communication for the citizens of the four-county area who are served by these healthcare entities.

It was apparent that each of the healthcare systems are appropriately prepared to address patient care needs of a potential COVID-19 patient, while simultaneously ensuring safe healthcare access and care delivery for all of the citizens of the communities served. The group also discussed the importance of healthcare worker safety, which is normal and a part of day-to-day operations in healthcare. Healthcare organizations follow OSHA and CDC recommendations regarding safety and infection control to prevent or stop the spread of infections in healthcare settings.

Dr. Nelson, Chief Medical Officer, for Hidalgo Medical Services stated, "Do not Panic! Protect and Prevent. Our healthcare systems will help in arranging for COVID-19 virus testing based on travel history, history of close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 and symptoms present. Routine testing without symptoms of a flu-like illness to include fever greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit and lower respiratory symptoms like cough or shortness of breath, is **not** recommended at this time. The very best way to prevent catching or transmitting Coronavirus is to wash your hands frequently, cover coughs and sneezes and avoid touching your face. Remember, do not panic! Protect and Prevent."

The CDC has issued these guidelines to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. These measures include: Wash your hands frequently for 20 seconds, don't touch your face, use a tissue or your elbow to catch your sneeze or cough, avoid large gatherings and close contact with sick people especially if you are elderly or high risk, if you have a cough, fever, or shortness of breath stay home from work or school, and avoid all unnecessary out-of-state travel. The Coronavirus hotline is 855-600-3453.

Area healthcare representatives want to convey that it is important to realize that the flu is also prevalent in the region; thus, if you are not feeling well, don't panic, as this does not mean you necessarily have COVID-19. Also, please be considerate of everyone and when shopping, to be sensible in not hoarding supplies and food. If you are going into a health clinic, if you have a fever and cough, you may want to call first, and when you arrive, ask for a mask. Be responsible and caring of others by taking just one mask. If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and symptoms, such as cough or difficulty breathing, call you healthcare provider for medical advice.

For more information, cv.nmhealth.org. Note: Press Release as submitted to all local news outlets on March 12, 2020.

##
#