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ND State Hospital provides update on COVID-19 preparedness; staff continue to provide vital behavioral health services

BISMARCK, N.D. - The North Dakota State Hospital in Jamestown is ramping up its COVID-19 preparedness efforts while maintaining specialized inpatient and residential care to individuals with severe, complex and persistent mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

"Our team members are working diligently to ensure that all patients continue to receive the appropriate and necessary behavioral health services needed to facilitate recovery," said Dr. Rosalie Etherington, the hospital's superintendent. "We have been focusing on our COVID-19 preparedness efforts, and if any state hospital patients were to test positive, plans are in place to respond quickly."

She said the state hospital created a unit to screen new patient admissions and to provide care should any patients test positive for COVID-19 but do not require regular medical or hospital services. Other emergency plans are in place to expand inpatient bed availability to meet needs.

The state hospital has the necessary personal protective gear and cleaning and disinfectant supplies on hand and meets safety standards as recommended by the North Dakota Department of Health. The hospital's emergency management team is also collaborating regularly with state and local partners on COVID-19 emergency preparedness planning.

"We are taking every measure we can to protect our entire campus from the spread of the coronavirus," Etherington said. "We are limiting group therapy sizes, modifying treatment settings, practicing social distancing, monitoring handwashing activities, screening all patients and staff for signs or symptoms and implementing other safety precautions as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention."

A visitor restriction policy remains in place. It will be reviewed later this month for possible extension for another 30 days. Patients can continue to communicate with friends and family by phone, computers and other electronic devices.

"There is a tremendous team working around the clock at the North Dakota State Hospital during this uncertain time," she said. "I am extremely grateful to each employee for their continued commitment to their work, the people we serve and to the community."

For more information on the North Dakota Department of Human Services response to COVID-19, visit www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid19/index.html. For details about the state's COVID-19 response, visit www.ndresponse.gov.

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