SGMC and COVID-19

According to the Georgia Department of Public Health, the spread of Coronavirus COVID-19 in Georgia and nationwide is increasing. As a result, South Georgia Medical Center is taking measured steps to prepare to care for these type of patients while creating and maintaining the safest environment possible for its employees, physicians, visitors and volunteers. This includes enhanced visitation policies published today.

According to SGMC, the CDC and Department of Public Health have been very helpful to hospitals and health delivery systems in developing preventive and preparedness guidance, which continues to evolve as health officials learn more about COVID-19.

SGMC continuously monitors these vital sources of information and remains in close contact with local, state and federal authorities to ensure the latest recommendations are included in response plans.

Although SGMC does not have a COVID-19 patient in any of its three hospitals, leadership was notified today that a former patient of the SGMC main hospital in Valdosta, who was treated on March 5th thru 7th and transferred to a hospital in Florida, has received a presumptive diagnosis of Coronavirus COVID-19. Because of this diagnosis and the exposure of some SGMC team members, out of an abundance of caution SGMC has enacted its exposure protocol as recommended by the CDC, with consultation from the Department of Public Health.

Specifically, the SGMC response team is evaluating the level of exposure for each identified staff member (high, medium or low) with guidance from the Department of Public Health. SGMC is proceeding with appropriate planning and communication with exposed team members. This communication includes monitoring guidelines as recommended by the CDC and a daily communication plan to assess for symptoms that could be related to an exposure.

SGMC Chief Medical Officer Dr. Brian Dawson shared, "SGMC's leadership team and employee health staff are currently in the process of reaching out to all members of the team that have been identified as being exposed to this patient and will continue to do so until all have been communicated with thoroughly."

"We want to ensure the community that SGMC is prepared to care for all types of patients, including those with COVID-19 symptoms and will continue to take all necessary precautions to maintain the safest environment for patients, staff and visitors," he continued.

All staff who were exposed will remain in close contact with SGMC leadership team and employee health staff. SGMC will continue to work closely with the Department of Public Health to ensure all appropriate plans are carried out according to CDC guidelines.
According to Dawson some staff members may immediately return to work, while others will remain at home until returning to work is appropriate. Regardless, our top priority is that we take every precaution to create the safest conditions possible for those exposed, our patients, our visitors and other members of our team.

SGMC continues to urge the public to follow preventative guidelines that include the following:

- Practice good hand hygiene, including frequent and thorough hand washing and proper use of hand sanitizer
- Avoid touching your face, including your eyes, nose and mouth
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home if you are sick, except to seek medical care
- If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as a cough or difficulty breathing, call your healthcare provider immediately

For more information on the latest information regarding COVID-19 visit cdc.gov or dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus. For further information regarding SGMC’s COVID-19 preparedness and local information, visit sgmc.org.