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# Hillcrest Inpatient Medicine Nurses on the Frontline

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The COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmed healthcare systems and deeply affected healthcare staff on the frontlines. Just as UC San Diego Health (UCSDH) was instrumental in spearheading care for patients during the then-unknown HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, UCSDH staff took on the challenge of caring for some of the earliest COVID-19 patients in the United States. To meet the needs of the pandemic, UC San Diego Health converted several inpatient medicine units into cohorted COVID-19 medical-surgical, progressive care and intensive care floors at the Hillcrest Medical Center. The Hillcrest 6th floor, 8th floor, 7/9 PCU, 10 CCU, 10 East PCU, and 11 PCU became COVID-19 units. UCSDH staff were confronted with medical supply shortages, including personal protective equipment (PPE) and staffing shortages coupled with fatigue and psychological stressors such as fear of disease transmission. Despite these challenges, each of the COVID-19 units implemented best practice, preparedness, and staff support to continue providing excellent care. Below are ways each of the Hillcrest COVID-19 units adapted while providing compassionate care for patients, families, and each other.

## 8th Floor

On February 5th, 2020, the Hillcrest Medical Center 8th floor admitted the first group of patients under investigation for COVID-19. These patients arrived on a flight from Wuhan, China into Marine Corps Air Station Miramar and began exhibiting symptoms while under federal quarantine. The 8th floor nursing staff worked with Infectious Disease physicians, the Infection Prevention and Clinical Epidemiology (IPCE) team, and the Incident Command Center to

ensure PPE and infection control competency while providing safe, quality care to this new patient population. The 8th floor nurses exemplified a high level of professionalism and dedication to their patients, team, and community.

As the pandemic evolved, UCSDH leadership decided to cohort the emerging COVID-19 patient population on a separate, previously unopened unit on 4 East. The 8th floor staff worked with Incident Command to quickly open the previously



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**Jennifer Rolley, MSN, RN, CPHQ, PCCN** has over 12 years of Medicine, Trauma, Transplant, and Surgical Oncology Nursing Experience. In 2014, Jennifer accepted her first position at UC San Diego Health and in 2019 earned her MSN from University of Texas, El Paso. Her current role focuses on Nursing Quality, Regulatory and Nursing Professional Development.

unstaffed, non-operational unit and safely transfer the COVID-19 patients. Though caring for patients with a novel infectious disease is intimidating, many 8th floor staff members volunteered to staff the new unit.

Compassionate nursing care is essential, particularly during a crisis. The first UCSDH COVID-19 patients had been through an exhausting and stressful journey, and they were frightened. They had traveled from Wuhan to federal quarantine and then to an isolated hospital room after displaying symptoms. Nurses recognized the need for addressing patients' psychosocial and cultural needs in addition to providing medical care. For instance, one 8th floor nurse identified a lack of hot drinking water for tea as a cultural gap and advocated for patients to have individual hot-water kettles. Constant collaboration with interdisciplinary teams and unit leadership led to improved efficiency and patient-centered interventions. The nursing staff recognized the importance of caring for this patient population on a local, national, and global level. They took pride in the opportunity to care for these patients, striving to provide a positive experience in a difficult and trying time.



Above: "We have each other's backs" (8th Floor Joshua de Jesus and Angelina Kondrokov)

Below: 8th Floor—Magnet Pride shining through, despite COVID-19. (L-R: Ashley Banaag, William Flores, and Radinka Yordanova)





## 10 CCU

Hillcrest Critical Care Unit (CCU) staff have developed and participated in several innovative solutions in response to the pandemic. 10 CCU received the first COVID-19 positive patient system-wide and became the designated COVID-19 ICU at the UCSDH Hillcrest campus. 10 CCU has had the privilege of participating in two COVID-related research studies. First, 10 CCU was one of the 60 sites around the world to contribute to the groundbreaking research on the antiviral drug Remdesivir during the ACTT-1 trial of Remdesivir vs. placebo. During the trial, CCU nurses were among the first clinicians in the world to administer this drug. The resulting research published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that Remdesivir was associated with a faster recovery time for patients with COVID-19 and it became implemented as best practice. The second study, led by a CCU RN, assessed the use of paralytics in proning COVID-19 patients with acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). The standard had been to utilize a paralytic when proning a patient. However, this study demonstrated that there was no significant difference in oxygenation or adverse events in paralyzing patients versus not paralyzing patients when

Top: 10 East PCU's message to the community early in the Pandemic.  
 (Top L-R: Vanessa Vinci, Briana Torok, Mini Velu, Liz Weinrib, Shawna Karmes; bottom L-R: Ruth Perez, Janine Nacua (USD MEPN student), Kiah Crowley, Enedina Rangel)  
 Above: 10 East PCU featured on the Youtube video "Some Good News" with John Krasinski representing Healthcare Heroes.  
 (Top L-R: Liz Whiteman, Molly Turdyn, Lauralee Pittman, Carla Profeta, Liz Weinrib, Maria Dunbar. Front row: Dr. Kevin Kwak, Enedina Rangel, Shawna Karmes.



10 East PCU Manager Dante Segundo and nurse Stephanie Lichtwardt preparing to enter a COVID-19 patient room.

they are prone to.

From the beginning of the pandemic, CCU staff and the San Diego community continuously thought of innovative ways to ensure staff safety and show support. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was an outpouring of donations of PPE (face shields, masks), food, and novelty items to help increase the safety and morale of the CCU staff. A telemetry technician's wife sewed masks to provide for the staff, a physician's friend donated 3D printed face shields, and individuals from across the country sent in homemade scrub caps to protect nurses. Another donor provided two-way radios for each of the 13 isolation rooms in the CCU. These two-way radios were a tremendous help in obtaining supplies, equipment, and additional aid without the need of donning/doffing valuable PPE or the infection control issue of having to repeatedly open the patient's door to



alert another team member that assistance was needed. A CCU nurse assembled "Code Blue" PPE packs, which includes five N95 masks and five face shields to make donning PPE quicker in emergent situations. These PPE Packs allowed the code nurse to respond to codes in the hospital quickly and efficiently without having to search for limited N95 masks and shields while in an unfamiliar location. Another frontline nurse volunteered as a goodwill ambassador during the pandemic and advocated for donations of scrubs, food, and small items that brought joy to the staff of CCU.

The CCU staff's endless compassion, innovation, and motivation to make a difference in the lives of their patients and coworkers has always been their trademark. However, through the pandemic, these traits were further heightened and will continue to be part of 10 CCU culture even after the pandemic ends.

Shannon Cotton volunteering in Mexico, in addition to staffing her own unit 10 ICU.

**Leah Federe, MSN, RN, PCCN**, has been a nurse for 25 years with 22 years spent working in 10 East PCU at Hillcrest. She is currently working on her DNP and hopes to finish within the year. UCSDH has been her home for so many years because of her coworkers and her patients.



**Dorothy Macavinta, MSN, RN, RN-BC, PCC** is an experienced clinician and a nurse leader. She has been a recipient of the David and Alice Miller UCSDH Nurse of the Year award in 2006. In 2020, she was recognized as a Nurse Leader of the year for Empirical Outcomes. When away from work, Dorothy enjoys spending quality time with family and friends.



**Rachel Lantacon, MSN, NP-CNS, AGPCNP-BC, CCRN** is the Assistant Nurse Manager for 7 West, 9 East, and 9 West. She started as a New Grad nurse at UCSDH in 2010 and later graduated from San Diego State University with her Master's. In her free time, she enjoys going to the park and playing dress up with her two little girls.

## 10 East PCU

10 East was one of the first units to care for patients with COVID-19 at the start of the pandemic. This sparked fear and uncertainty in the staff. They feared contracting the virus and potentially bringing it home to their families. Despite their fear, their compassion and sense of responsibility to the community and their patients gave them the strength to face this pandemic head on. Some nurses stayed away from their homes for days to reduce the risk of transmission to their family members.

Some COVID-19 patients were very sick and deteriorated quickly. The nurses were quick to react and called rapid responses or codes when indicated. During one rapid response that was escalating to a code blue situation, one of our clinical care partners, who is now a nurse and just completed the UCSDH nurse residency program, noted the team using valuable time looking for PPE during these emergent situations. To help save valuable time, she created a COVID-19 Code Blue Box. It is a container filled with PPE for the code team during rapid responses or codes. It is always stocked and readily available with the appropriate PPE to care for COVID-19 patients and is now housed on every unit that cares for COVID-19 patients.

The 10 East nurses took on new responsibilities to keep the unit running. They became housekeepers, case managers, social workers and dietitians. When visitors were not allowed, the nurses became patients' friends, family members and provided hope for recovery. To prepare for the possibility of a surge, 10 East nurses learned how to manage ventilators through an asynchronous learning model adapted for the pandemic. Despite the endless changes and challenges, nurses continued to provide safe, compassionate and excellent care. Nurses on 10 East have shown incredible resilience and continue to show their friendship and support for one another throughout the pandemic.

## 7 West/9 West PCU

The 9 West Medical ICU was transformed into a COVID-19 Progressive Care Unit seemingly overnight to meet the increasing census of COVID-19 positive patients requiring intermediate care and close monitoring. 9 West began caring for patients that warranted a high level of care and direct observation but were stable enough not to warrant intensive care. For example, patients in 10 CCU who were otherwise stable but required high flow oxygen were identified by pulmonary ICU attending physicians and downgraded to PCU level of care due to a shortage of ICU beds. With just-in-time in services, 9 PCU was able to provide high flow oxygenation >60% FiO<sub>2</sub> along with the support of Respiratory Therapists to patients requiring this kind of care. 9 West was also the first PCU to care for a patient on a ventilator until there was ICU bed availability.

To meet physical and infection control requirements, 9 West needed to convert its space. The unit layout has six beds in an open bay and is known as "The Fishbowl" by its nursing staff. To become a COVID-19 unit and for infection control purposes, the structure of the unit required the unit doors to always remain closed and clear plastic barricades were erected to separate the nursing station from patient beds but still allow direct patient observation. Interdisciplinary teams rapidly prepared the unit with supplies and equipment, posted infection control signage, and staff received just-in-time training on using high-flow oxygen equipment, ventilators, COVID-19 infection control, donning and doffing of PPE, and using Powered-Air Purifying Respirators (PAPRs).

The 9 West PCU conversion, although swiftly completed, was safely transitioned. A large interdisciplinary team continually assessed the environment of care to meet the needs of patients and staff. Members from many disciplines including Quality and Patient Safety, Regulatory Affairs, Facilities Engineering, the ICU Medical Director, the Infectious Disease Medical Director, Nursing Administration, Risk Management, and many other departments helped open and support the unit.



“I can see you—but I can’t hear you!” Navigating extra logistical challenges that came with COVID-19 era. [L-R: Bella Gulkarova (7W), Kathryn Brown (7W), and Maria Fernandes (9 PCU)]

9 PCU RN Mariah Ramos collaborating with MD/RT team to care for patients



Due to the open nature of the unit, 9 PCU nurses had to remain in PPE for an entire shift. Despite the long hours and stressful nature of caring for patients with a novel disease, 9 PCU nurses continued to provide excellent care. 7 West PCU nurses made themselves available to provide support when a necessary break was needed.

Interdisciplinary collaboration with teams led to innovative strategies for stocking supplies and staff support such as the use of a linen cart to replenish supplies from storehouse, providing hospital scrubs for nursing staff, designated space for staff to store individual PAPRs, and providing pens and paper in patient rooms for nurses to communicate forgotten items while at the bedside in order to preserve PPE.

9 West nurses report they grew and learned from their experiences and they move forward with compassion and empathy for patients and their families. As the number of patients with COVID-19 declines, 9 West will transition back into a medical unit and will continue to care for patients on high flow oxygenation needing direct observation. The whole team responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with the heart and skills of resilient staff and exemplified the best of the best!



“We can do this!” Leaders and staff ready 9 PCU to become the next COVID-19 unit at a moment’s notice. (Edna Culp, Jeselyn Edjan, Socorrina Diaz, Jona Niones, Monette Paragili, Dorothy Macavinta, and Rachel Lantacon.)



**Edna V. Culp, MSN, RN, CNS** is the Advance Practice Specialist for 7 West, 9 West, and 9 East in Hillcrest. She received her BSN from Seattle Pacific University and her Master's in Nursing, CNS in Adult Gerontology from University of San Diego. She has over 23 years of experience in various nursing roles including ICU, PACU, Transition Nurse Specialist, and Transitional Telephonic Nurse. She is passionate about her volunteer work with Movement Disorders Design Review and Well Spouse Association.

## 6th Floor

To respond to the PPE shortage crisis while maintaining best infection control practices, the 6th floor trialed several innovations. They trialed the utilization of reusable gowns, "COVID Carts" for supply management and organization, and partnered with the resource nurses to provide increased support to primary nurses with COVID-19 patient assignments. COVID Carts were fully implemented because they improved efficient access to necessary PPE supplies, improved nurse satisfaction, and the carts were easily stocked.

6th floor team members participated in the "6th Floor COVID Morale Team" project to promote nurse resilience and psychological support. Morale Team leads collected photos and videos of significant moments throughout 2020-2021 to highlight team spirit and efforts. Heartfelt tokens of gratitude continue to be distributed by the Morale Team and has enhanced the 6th floor team's ability to cope with the stress of the pandemic.



"Coming up smelling like roses..." (6th Floor L-R: Tania Miller, Melissa Alberto, and Karenne Ruiz)



6th Floor spreading some 'COVID-friendly' holiday cheer...



Desiree and Venessa ‘twinning it’ on the 6th Floor



Taking the shot (vaccination) to protect ourselves and each other—“Feeling Cared for” (6th Floor: Shar Fontanares and Oliver Orece)



“Teamwork Makes Dream Work...now back to 6-feet apart!” (6th Floor Clockwise: Desiree Penetrante , Vanessa Taneo, John Manzano, Tania Miller, Monica Pita, Bea Lizarraga, Genesis Bojorquez, Terika Island, Sonia Thomas, and Agnes Bocalan)



Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate...Cheers” (6th Floor L-R: Jamie Kim, Oliver Erece, Terika Island, Tania Miller, and Imee Gasmido.)



11th Floor Progressive Care Unit finding ways to celebrate Magnet re-designation in spite of pandemic



11 PCU at DES Boards (L-R: Heather Davis, Josh Villagrana, Rachael Kendall, Colby Thompson, Eva Terry and Monica Rivera.)

Diana Davalos (11 PCU) first vaccine dose



## 11th Floor PCU

During the December 2020 COVID-19 surge, the 11th Floor Progressive Care Unit transitioned into a designated COVID-19 unit. The 11th floor adapted the best practices from other early primary COVID-19 units in caring for patients and effectively utilizing resources and PPE. The nursing team took pride in the opportunity to provide quality care while striving to provide positive experiences during a difficult time.

During the same time, UCSDH opened the vaccination superstation at Petco Park and began vaccinating the San Diego community. The 11th floor staff volunteered to work at the vaccination superstation. Their experience of fighting COVID-19 by treating the hospitalized gave many nurses a sense of achievement. Nurses displayed dedication to each other, their patients, and their community.



11 PCU Manager and ANIs celebrating at mid-pandemic Holiday party (L-R: Diana Davalos, Anthony Adams, Leah Yoshitaki-Yusi )



11th Floor Progressive Care Unit Based Practice Meetings being held via Zoom as pivot solution to endure pandemic restrictions

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