

National Hospital Week: Time to Celebrate Healthcare Heroes

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During these unprecedented times, we're all seeking comfort in the few things in life that we can count on. Family. Friends. The sun coming up in the morning. The flowers blooming in the springtime. And there is something else that we all can count on – *the hospitals and health systems in West Virginia*. They are diverse, impressive buildings – but more importantly, they are places that take us from illness to wellness even when the world around us seems chaotic and uncertain.

Amid the current COVID-19 pandemic, the 46,000 frontline healthcare professionals in West Virginia's hospitals and health systems are our HEROES, and very fittingly, we celebrate them this week as we recognize *National Hospital Week May 10 - 16*.

While there are many individual healthcare observances throughout the year aimed at recognizing doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals for their important roles, *National Hospital Week* gives us the opportunity to recognize all our healthcare professionals. No matter their role, everyone at a West Virginia hospital contributes to the mission of providing excellent care and interacting with their patients. Every employee is an important piece of the puzzle that makes up the remarkable hospital field in West Virginia.

We are the largest component of the healthcare sector in West Virginia, supporting nearly \$10.5 billion in economic activity to our state's economy. Hospitals account for 14 of the top 100 employers in West Virginia; we admit over 227,000 patients annually; provide care for seven million outpatients; treat over 1.2 million people in emergency departments; perform nearly 270,000 surgeries; and welcome nearly 19,000 newborns in the world.

As impressive as these figures are, the West Virginia hospital community is not without its challenges, some of which are rooted in long-standing realities of rural healthcare. These challenges are well-documented by recent announcements of hospital closures and financial difficulties, but it bears repeating – especially now, in the face of a pandemic that's putting even greater pressure on the healthcare delivery system in West Virginia. A heavy reliance on government payers and an older population with more chronic conditions, to name just a few issues, are all contributing factors to the continuing strain placed on our hospitals. I'm encouraged however by the increasing stakeholder attention to these and other healthcare needs in West Virginia.

Even in normal times, healthcare delivery is very challenging from a financial and operational perspective, and the ongoing fight against COVID-19 is exacerbating the problem for our hospitals and health systems not only in West Virginia but nationally. A new report recently released by the American Hospital Association (AHA) confirms the tremendous financial strain that hospitals and health systems on the front lines are facing in the fight against COVID-19. The report estimates a total financial impact of more than \$200 billion in losses resulting from COVID expenses and lost revenue for hospitals and health systems nationally over the four-month period from March 1, 2020 to June 30, 2020 - or an average of over \$50 billion in losses a month.

For this report, the total financial impact on hospitals and health systems includes the costs of COVID-19 hospitalizations, the impact of canceled and foregone services due to COVID-19 on hospital revenue, the additional costs associated with purchasing needed personal protective equipment (PPE), and the costs of additional support some hospitals are providing to their workers. For example, some hospitals are providing childcare, housing and transportation for their front-line caregivers and other employees.

And these are the same challenges being experienced by West Virginia hospitals and health systems as they continue to respond to COVID-19.

I'm incredibly proud at how our hospital leadership teams and their compassionate caregivers continue to respond and step up in heroic and unprecedented ways. And I know that our West Virginia families, friends and neighbors all feel the same way because together we've cheered our nurses, physicians, emergency medical technicians, orderlies, dieticians and other hospital workers who have cared for, and touched the lives of their patients under extraordinary circumstances. Together, we've applauded the lab techs and scientists working around the clock who perform test results and develop new innovations. And we now see a path forward of what will be a new normal for all of us.

We continue to be inspired by the ingenuity and dedication of the women and men of West Virginia's hospitals. In times of crisis, patients and communities turn to their local hospitals, and it remains the same now in these uncertain times.

This week I hope all West Virginians will join us in recognizing the vital role our hospitals and health systems play now and always. Accidents happen. Illnesses happen. Births happen. And, yes, Pandemics happen. But as they happen, there's one place that West Virginians can rely on in good times and bad, 24/7 — your hospital. THANK YOU for all you are doing.