Encompass Health never stopped serving their patients. They made proactive changes to protect their employees and patients, so they could continue to provide their essential services safely and effectively.
W
ell before COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, Encompass Health leadership was assessing the situation, determining just how it would adjust its care to protect both patients and employees.

As the company’s operating environment adapted and evolved, it continued to offer services to patients recovering from life-changing illnesses and conditions such as stroke and brain injury. However, as more patients began recovering from COVID-19, it also became clear that those same services could benefit patients recovering from the virus as well.

Based in Birmingham, Ala., Encompass Health is a national leader in integrated healthcare, offering both facility-based and home-based care through its network of inpatient rehabilitation hospitals and home health and hospice locations. Of its more than 130 inpatient rehabilitation hospitals in 37 states, seven are located in Alabama, as is the company’s home office, together employing more than 2,200. Its home health and hospice segment employees an
other roughly 1,000 in the state.

Inpatient rehabilitation of patients have a care team made up of nurses, therapists, case managers and a physician that help them set and accomplish specific goals unique to them. Those recovering from COVID-19 in an Encompass Health hospital are receiving that same team approach.

While it varies from market to market, Kennedy said where needed, COVID-19 units have been set up inside Encompass Health hospitals to treat this patient population. Though they are recovering from COVID-19, he said the hospitals treat them as they are still positive and assign them to rooms located away from the other patients. Staff is also donned in full personal protective equipment, and therapy takes place within the patient room instead of in the therapy gym.

While some markets have seen an influx of patients recovering from COVID-19, others are more business as usual, Kennedy said, but all have ramped up existing infection control and safety protocols to prevent the spread of the virus. “People are still having strokes and other debilitating conditions and injuries that can benefit from inpatient rehabilitation,” he said. “During this pandemic, our doors have remained open to patients, and we’re constantly assessing the situation and updating policies and protocols to best protect our patients and employees.”

In general, visitation is limited. When visitation is allowed, visitors undergo a screening process, including temperature checks. Employees, physicians and all essential vendors are also screened before entering the hospital. In our therapy gyms, social distancing practices are in place and equipment is thoroughly cleaned after each use.

Kennedy said he knows some of these protocols have been difficult, particularly the visitation policy, but he’s overwhelmed by how staff has responded, finding creative solutions to keep family members connected and also supporting one another and their communities. “Encompass Health is a resilient company, and our employees are our foundation,” he said. “From setting up FaceTime calls to helping family members and friends locate their loved one’s patient window, they’ve really gone above and beyond to keep our patients comfortable and in communications with their loved ones. During these challenging times, our employees have continued to provide high quality care, which truly does make them heroes.”

“As we learn from the situation, we continue to improve our processes and procedures. We assess the situation, determine what we need to do, and act,” Kennedy said. “We were prepared for this situation, and we are taking steps to address it. We are working very closely with state and local health officials, as well as with our employees to ensure the safety of our patients and our employees.”

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