

### HCA FLORIDA DURING COVID PANDEMIC

#### AUTHORS

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#### INTRODUCTION

As COVID continued to ravage the country and the state of Florida, Healthcare Corporation of America (HCA), Florida, geared up to the challenge. There were many challenges faced by the health system. Initial community infections were traced to Jan 2020, followed by March 2020, beginning where the first confirmed case was reported in Florida. Soon after, there followed a surge of the pandemic in June 2020 after the initial lockdown in April 2020, followed by relaxation by the state in May-June 2020.

HCA Florida has done a tremendous job in addressing the challenges of this pandemic, re-orienting itself to mitigate some of the issues and ensuring that the community that it serves get the best of service, keeping in mind the safety of the people and its staff.

#### ABOUT HCA FLORIDA

HCA Healthcare is a for-profit organization that was set up in 1968.<sup>1</sup> It is one of the first hospital companies in the United States. Currently, in 2020, it is one of the leading healthcare providers in the United States and consists of 184 hospitals and approximately 2,000 sites of care that include Urgent Care, Physician Centers, Surgery Centers, and Emergency Centers in 21 states of U.S. and United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> It has more than 280,000 healthcare colleagues.<sup>3</sup> HCA, Florida, is one of the largest private hospitals in Florida and has around 50 hospitals and 31 surgery centers in the state.<sup>4</sup> It has four hospital affiliations in the state of Florida – HCA East Florida, HCA West Florida, HCA South Atlantic, and HCA North Florida.<sup>5</sup> Table 1 lists the details about the four affiliations of HCA, Florida.

#### THE ONSET OF COVID IN FLORIDA

The first two presumptive cases of COVID disease were reported on March 01, 2020.<sup>6</sup> However, there were reports that the community spread had started as early as January 2020.<sup>7</sup> On March 11, 2020, Governor Ron DeSantis stated in

a press conference that Florida is one of the four states with community spread of the disease and therefore was more at risk.<sup>8</sup> He subsequently issued a statewide stay-at-home order on April 01, 2020.<sup>9</sup> However, restrictions were eased in some parts of Florida in April 2020.

Flagler County announced that the beaches would reopen for exercising and fishing with restrictions on socializing.<sup>10</sup> Brevard County removed the limits on sunbathing.<sup>11</sup> Lockdown was eased in May 2020 and June 2020, and there was a surge in cases starting June 2020.<sup>12</sup>

**TABLE 1: HCA FLORIDA**

HCA East Florida	HCA East Florida - The headquarter is at Fort Lauderdale, and the Division comprises of 14 affiliated hospitals in various locations from Treasure Coast to South Dade County The Division also has multiple ambulatory surgery centers, imaging centers, a supply chain center, four free-standing emergency care facilities, and an integrated regional laboratory. Together, the network employs more than 16,500 individuals and more than 6,000 physicians on staff. <sup>13</sup>
HCA West Florida	The network comprises of 15 hospitals with 25 E.R. locations and 14 surgery centers. Also, it has 43 graduate medical education programs and a complete range of specialized health programs and services to meet the healthcare needs of residents and businesses. In 2018, the Division treated more than 1.2 million patients and provided an economic benefit to the area of more than \$2.2 billion. <sup>14</sup>
HCA North Florida	The network comprises of 14 hospitals in North Florida and Central Florida affiliated with HCA. It has more than 14,000 employees, committed to a Healthy Community. <sup>15</sup>
HCA South Atlantic	The network is headquartered in Charleston, SC, and includes 12 hospitals located in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Along with hospital-based E.R.s, this Division includes numerous community-based E.R.s. These free-standing E.R.s place care close to home, where the community needs the service most. They also offer several elite Trauma programs that take care of the most critically ill and injured patients. In Florida, they have two centers in Jacksonville – Memorial health and Orange Park Medical Center. <sup>16</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://hcahealthcare.com/about/our-history.dot>

<sup>2</sup> <https://hcahealthcare.com/about/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://hcahealthcareimpact.com/excellent-people-make-excellence-happen/our-people/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://flahospitals.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://flahospitals.com/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.floridahealth.gov/newsroom/2020/03/030120-two-presumptive-positive-covid19-cases.pr.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/20200505/coronavirus-florida-patients-in-florida-had-symptoms-as-early-as-january>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/health-care/article241109331.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.tampabay.com/news/health/2020/04/01/florida-gov-ron-desantis-issues-statewide-stay-at-home-order/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.newsbreak.com/florida/flagler-beach/news/1551005599693/flagler-county-beaches-will-reopen-for-exercising-fishing-not-socializing>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.mynews13.com/fl/orlando/news/2020/04/21/brevard-cities-lift-beach-restrictions-on-sunbathing--group-activity>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/florida-coronavirus-cases.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://hcaeastflorida.com/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://hcawestflorida.com/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://hcanorthflorida.com/about/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://hcasouthatlantic.com/about/>

**FIGURE 1: COVID-19 IN FLORIDA AS OF JULY 27, 2020**


As of July 27, 2020, Florida has the third-highest number of cases in the country after California and New York.<sup>17</sup> Figure 1 depicts the number of COVID situation in Florida, as on July 27, 2020.

### CHALLENGES FACED BY HCA FLORIDA DUE TO COVID

HCA, like any other healthcare system in the country, had its share of challenges due to the pandemic. However, they adapted to the situation and addressed the issues to the best possible extend.

#### INITIAL UNCERTAINTY PERIOD

*“The first COVID patient at Westside Regional was reported on March 12, 2020. Soon before that, 28 student travelers came back from Ireland who fell ill. COVID was a completely unknown illness, so there was much ambiguity to navigate. Guidelines from the CDC were not immediately available, and those that were, continued to change as more was discovered, was the candid admittance of Ashley Vertuno, Chief Operating Officer of Westside Regional Medical Center, HCA. “Within the next two weeks, the number of patients with confirmed COVID infection increased, and we had to make many efforts to limit staff exposure.”*

By the end of March 2020, there was an executive order to shut down the elective procedures to manage and sustain the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Medical procedures were restricted for emergency cases only.

#### PPE SUPPLY RELIABILITY

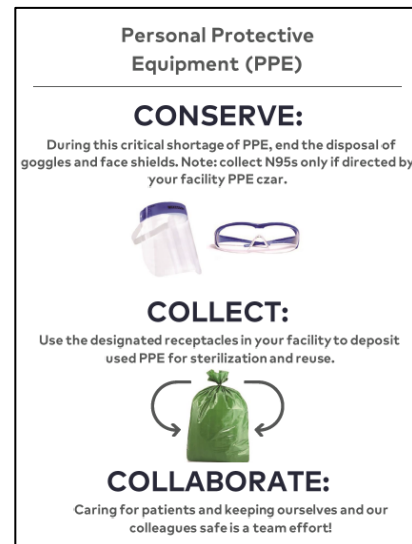
Early on, PPE task forces were organized and assembled throughout the HCA system. These task forces are multidisciplinary teams that overlooked the management and supply of PPEs for their designated hospitals by looking at the number of critical resources, burn rate, and initial days on hand for each essential item.

Each hospital also had a designated PPE Czar who was in charge of distributing PPEs based on the role of each staff and the level of exposure the team had for the virus. The whole of HCA wanted everyone to be protected and had to figure out how to enforce it within the organization and make it part of the DNA during this pandemic. Adequate education and seamless communication with the staff were critical. Critical supplies were reallocated across HCA to hotspots. It was the responsibility of the education team to communicate that the organization is keeping people safe. Frequent

communication and sharing of strategy and updates to the front line staff were critical.

*“The N95 mask is one of the only masks that have a 99.999 absorb rate allowing almost no germs to go through. This became a scarcity. KN95s became an option that was used. They do have a weakness because if the KN95 is soiled, you cannot use it again. We started using K95 masks around Mid-April. There was some staff dissatisfaction when the switch was made from N95 to KN95. The communication that they are equivalent PPE was vital”,* quoted Ashley during his interview with the authors.

HCA Florida put a reprocessing process in place for goggles, face shields, and N95 masks using Tru-D ultraviolet technology. At the end of the shift, employees put these items in a particular bin, and those were reprocessed for reuse using the ultraviolet system (Figure 2 shows the document used to inform reprocessing). However, this reprocessing could be done for masks that were not visibly dirty. It is a position of leadership to ensure employees are provided with education on process changes and new technology used to kill the germs on the masks.

**FIGURE 2: PPE DOCUMENT USED FOR REPROCESSING**


HCA employees asked for more education, so HCA provided evidence-based literature to support the change in process with CDC recommendations. The HCA team in charge of the PPE distribution and management, as well as the education team, conducted a survey throughout this time on the efficiency of communication. Not only did the studies indicate that the HCA leadership team had been communicating sufficiently and adequately by routinely rounding but results also showed that employees knew that hospital executive were there for all staff. HCA avoided and

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/us/>

confronted any misinterpretations or confusion by constant factual-based communication.

There was never a point where the HCA staff did not have the supplies they needed. However, there are ongoing PPE shortages in the market during the pandemic. HCA managed to have a good enough stock. *“As an administrator, there is a fear of not being able to provide for your staff; however, due to the large scale of HCA Healthcare, we were always supported.”* – opined Ashley.

### SERVICE QUALITY WHILE REDUCING EXPOSURE

Visitation had been a tricky thing to manage. Healthcare is a service that needs to be at its best by the end of the day. There is a need to make sure patients are happy, assured, and getting great care. Visitors are a significant component of the healthcare arena. The visitation policy has had to be adjusted several times. *“By the evening of the interview, we were going back to the policy of no visitors in the inpatient unit. This means the community has to trust us to take care of their loved ones.”* – stated Ashley in his interview on July 02, 2020.

HCA had expanded their telemedicine capacity to allow for better communication with families through Facetime, Skype, and WhatsApp to include them. They embraced technology solutions to facilitate virtual communication and staying connected at a distance under this surreal period of the pandemic, which generally would have been more challenging to employ.

### OTHER CHALLENGES

CARES Act funding was not sufficient. The CARES Act funding for HCA Healthcare had been a generous amount. However, it represents a portion of the lost revenue and incremental expenses that the group has experienced during this pandemic. HCA Healthcare has around 180 U.S. hospitals that provide about 5 percent of all inpatient hospital services in the country, yet HCA received about 2 percent of the CARES Act funds distributed to hospitals.<sup>18</sup>

In the second wave of COVID, HCA, Florida, had more staff exposures. The exposures did not happen in the hospital, and more likely among the younger staff members. Eighteen staff exposures were identified in the last week of June 2020.

*“Managing staff emotions and stress during this difficult time is a challenge when everything seems to be non-stop and changing fast. So the staff needs to be able to have an outlet for their stress. Educating them to keep practicing precautions has been a positive thing. The priority has been staff knowing that we are in it together”* – Ashley.

### CONCLUSION

HCA, Florida, had ensured that it is living up to the expectation of the community as well as its staff. Safety as

well as minimizing the infection spread, optimizing the use and burn rate of critical items such as PPEs, and ensuring that the best of service is provided to the best of extend during this pandemic had been the constant endeavor of the organization.

**FIGURE 3: HCA WESTSIDE STRESS RELIEVING TACTICS INFORMATION SHARED WITH STAFF**



### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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<sup>18</sup> <https://hcahealthcare.com/covid-19/faqs/hca-healthcare-cares-act-faqs.dot>