

In the fight against COVID-19, hospitalists rise to the challenge

For more than 20 years, hospitalists have played a key role in caring for hospitalized patients. That role has become even more significant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Trained as thoroughly as other internal medicine doctors, hospitalists share all the same skills as their colleagues but, instead of practicing in an office setting, focus on the care of hospitalized patients.

“Due to the nature of our work, we are very well positioned to think outside the box, when it comes to patient care,” says Christina Beyer, MD, who was recently named Director of the Division of Hospital Medicine at Newport Hospital. “We’ve been partnering with colleagues in departments across the hospital to balance competing interests such as patient safety, maximizing throughput, conserving Personal Protective Equipment, developing alternative staffing models, considering alternative locations for patient care, and creating policies and procedures for triaging patients, emerging treatments, and limited resources. “

As the COVID-19 crisis developed internationally, hospitalists began preparing for its arrival here in multiple ways, including ramping up education on managing respiratory failure, studying the experiences of other countries and states, and sharpening their intubation skills in the hospital simulation center.

“We have all been preparing psychologically for what is essentially like being deployed for battle,” Dr. Beyer said. “We are thinking strategically about how to match our skills and numbers to meet a surge of patients, while protecting our staff from becoming ill. There has been a massive effort nationally, including here in the Newport region, to expand the use of telemedicine technology to reduce consumption of masks and still get our patients the specialty expertise they need.”

In her role as director, Dr. Beyer is involved in the crisis response in multiple ways. As a physician, she provides direct patient care and educates and consoles families remotely because they are not allowed to visit. As a director, she disseminates information, develops disaster staffing plans, and participates in the hospital incident command structure.

“I need to be able to support the people with whom I work because they are our most precious resource,” she says. “I am also a source of information and support to my family and friends who do not work in health care. It is part of my responsibility to educate everyone I know about the importance of social distancing and self-quarantine.”

Lifespan and Newport Hospital have been running the equivalent of a sprint and a marathon simultaneously in response to COVID-10. Planning was ramped up in the early stages of the outbreak overseas and efforts to treat the sick and procure and manage both human and clinical resources are ongoing and evolving.

“It is inspiring, really. The effort across the system is incredibly comprehensive, collegial, and creative,” Dr. Beyer says. “We are in the most difficult situation we have ever faced. We all wish things could be different, but we can be proud of the expertise and dedication we have right here in Newport and R.I.”

Christina Beyer, MD, is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and completed her residency program at The Warren Alpert School of Medicine at Rhode Island Hospital. In 2017, Dr. Beyer

was named a Top Doc for Hospital Medicine in Rhode Island Monthly and a Lifespan Quality Leader in 2016.