

CHCS purchases ventilator thanks to Caring Community Foundation donations

As COVID-19 swept into the U.S., then the Midwest, it upended everyone's plans for 2020. Difficulties have abounded, but bright spots have also emerged. One example is the charitable efforts of area citizens.

The Caring Community Foundation, or CCF, recently donated \$4,000 to Community HealthCare System, or CHCS, as part of a larger effort to provide local COVID-19 relief. CHCS is allocating those funds to the purchase of a new transport ventilator, raising the total to two.

Ventilators are machines that help patients breathe when they are having surgery or when they cannot breathe on their own because of a critical illness. Transport ventilators are designed to be portable and to provide noninvasive ventilation.

According to Chief Nursing Office Mindy Olberding, the ventilator, an AHP 300, will help CHCS be more prepared to treat COVID-19 patients.

"As you have heard in the news, many of the metropolitan community hospitals are nearing or exceeding their capacity for ICU management related to COVID-19. Having a ventilator at our facility means we can stabilize and monitor a patient safely while we wait for transport arrangements to be made with a larger hospital. This process can take hours when larger hospitals are busy," Olberding said.

The ventilator will also broaden CHCS's ability to assist patients who need respiratory support. "We can respond to more issues, including patients with pulmonary edema associated with congestive heart failure or patients with COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease]. It's important for us to support these patients when they are awaiting transport," Olberding said.

Caring Community Foundation funds came from local donors to an Emergency Fund that CCF established in early April. Givers can direct donations to food assistance or rent/utilities assistance for area residents who lost income because of illness or job losses associated with COVID-19, or to healthcare.

"Our aim is to provide expedient, confidential assistance to those in need," said Susie Kufahl, director of the Community Caring Foundation.

CCF is waiving all administrative fees for Emergency Fund donations and collaborates with food banks in several communities and with Community Care Ministries in Wamego to ensure that those in need are served. Assisting healthcare in the response to COVID-19 is also a primary aim.

"Though the CCF and CHCS are separate organizations, they serve each other and all of the same communities. Assisting CHCS is our first priority in healthcare response," Kufahl said.

Michelle Budreau, CHCS respiratory therapist, said the new ventilator will help serve patients safely and effectively. "Previously, it would take one staff member to breathe for the patient with a manual bag ventilator throughout transport to another hospital. This will help free up that person to get other things done that the patient may need," she said.

"The ventilator will also safely deliver the right amount and frequency of breath, causing less trauma to the patient and, hopefully, meaning a better recovery time in the long run," Budreau said.

Budreau is helping to provide ongoing training and education for CHCS providers and nurses on how to use the new transport ventilator. Training included several hours of video instruction, policy review, plus a live, in-person session. Training will be updated yearly.

The gift has provided uplifting support in a difficult time for healthcare.

“It feels good to be part of a team, including the community, that really cares about people. We do what is the best and what is right, and we treat everyone like family,” Budreau said.

Olberding also appreciates the community’s efforts.

“One of my favorite quotes is from Helen Keller. She said, ‘Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.’ CHCS is blessed to have the support of the Caring Community Foundation to help us meet the needs of our community, and we thank CCF and the many donors who support our efforts,” Olberding said.

Photo caption: Left to right: Robert Ladner, Community HealthCare System and Caring Community Foundation board member, and Susie Kufahl, Caring Community Foundation director, present the AHP 300 transport ventilator to CHCS CEO Todd Willert. The ventilator was purchased with funds donated by area residents to the CCF Emergency Fund to provide COVID-19 relief.

