

Cutline: Photo of skilled nursing facility outreach and support (SOS) team and personnel from Vista Pacifica skilled nursing facility. The SOS teams made their 1,000th visit to a group care site today.



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Special teams reach 1,000 visits to nursing facilities and other group living sites

A special team of county and private emergency workers reached a milestone today (Thursday, Aug. 27). The Skilled Nursing Facilities Outreach Support (or SOS) teams conducted their 1,000th visit at a licensed group living facility, providing educational training, equipment and behavioral health support.

The 1,000th visit was at Vista Pacifica Convalescent skilled nursing facility (SNF) in Riverside. The active participation and interest in the SOS program from the county's 53 SNFs and other assisted living facilities has been tremendous – which officials say largely contributes to the success of the program.

“This is a very proud milestone for the SOS teams and Riverside County,” said Dr. Frank Flowers of the Riverside University Health System. “Our main goal was to offer an extra layer of support for the hardworking health care teams providing care in congregate living facilities. They are caring for some of our most vulnerable and we wanted to help them be successful in caring for patients during this pandemic.”

These teams – the first of their kind within the state – jumped into action on April 14 after county health professionals recognized a critical need to provide education, support and equipment at these facilities. Rehabilitation facilities and nursing homes present a challenge for

health officials due to the age and health conditions of the residents, as well as their proximity to each other.

“Skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities are a critical piece to our county’s response to coronavirus. Supporting these sites has made our entire response to the pandemic stronger,” said Bruce Barton, director for the Emergency Management Department. “Based on the success of the SOS team model, we’ve been able to expand the program so that the teams now visit homeless shelters, recovery centers and other group living sites based on need.”

The teams worked closely with staff members at the facilities to demonstrate proper safety techniques, provide safety gear and educate employees about COVID-19 to dispel rumors and correct erroneous information. After sharing the SOS program model throughout the state, other counties and cities have developed similar programs.

The concept behind the SOS teams was aimed at preventing a situation that occurred earlier in April when a skilled nursing facility in Riverside could not continue functioning after employees did not show up to work. That facility, the Magnolia Family and Rehabilitation Center, was evacuated on April 8. It reopened on July 17.

“Being the first of its kind, the Riverside County SOS concept became a model for the rest of California,” said Board Chair V. Manuel Perez, Fourth District Supervisor. “Besides being one of the first counties to establish such a program for our SNFs, I especially appreciate that our SOS teams expanded their outreach to other vulnerable communities and have built capacity of other health care providers. These are skill sets that the facilities can own forever.”

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