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Media contact:

Riverside County Joint Information Center
951-955-5087

Public contact: 2-1-1

Skilled nursing facility reopens to patients after April evacuation

A Riverside skilled nursing facility where more than 80 patients were evacuated in April reopened today. The California Department of Public Health reviewed the facility and approved its reopening.

The Magnolia Rehabilitation and Nursing Center was in the national spotlight when patients were evacuated by first responders from the county, City of Riverside and local ambulance providers.

The facility worked with the state and county for several months on its reopening plan, including providing additional employee training and personal protective equipment. The county's Skilled Nursing Facility Outreach and Support (SOS) teams visited the facility twice in recent weeks.

The facility started accepting patients today, marking a comeback story for its owner, its employees and Riverside County, said Dr. Frank Flowers with the Riverside University Health System.

"This is a facility where long-time employees formed bonds with patients for many years," Dr. Flowers said. "Back in April, many of those employees tested positive for the coronavirus and did not go to work to protect those people. It was heartbreaking for these workers to not be with their patients."

Veronica Mayes, owner of the Magnolia Rehabilitation and Nursing Center, praised her team and expressed her graciousness toward Dr. Flowers and the county during an informal, welcome-back speech at the facility on Thursday.

By telephone, Ms. Mayes said she was pleased to be able to help people again.

“Even in the darkness, there is always light,” she said. “You always find a new path. The people inside here are what make it a home.”

On April 8, Riverside University Health System and Kaiser Permanente sent 33 licensed vocational nurses and registered nurses to care for the 84 residents at the facility. The action was prompted after one certified nursing assistant – out of 13 staffers scheduled to work that day – was the lone employee at Magnolia. Ultimately, the patients were evacuated to other facilities throughout the county, and county employees notified family members of the evacuation.

“The reopening of Magnolia Rehabilitation Center will be a big help to ease the burden from our local hospitals,” said Vice Chair Karen Spiegel. “Skilled nursing facilities treat patients recently discharged from the hospital and they are a critical part of our surge plans.”

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