



Dear Friends and Neighbors:

As we write this message, we see Covid infections surround us at an unprecedented and record rate. As infection rates have increased, the number of hospitalizations and deaths have also increased. We have seen health systems in other communities around the country stressed beyond their ability to care for the people that they serve. Our neighbors in LaCrosse are now seeing significant enough volumes that they have had to make a decision on where to allocate their resources. Gundersen Health and Mayo Clinic have both been forced to cancel elective inpatient surgeries.

We now face this same situation in Vernon County. Our Emergency Room volumes have increased dramatically. Our inpatient Covid volumes are at an all-time high. Our staff is getting sick and unable to work. Our ability to run our hospital day to day is put at risk by this.

Last spring and summer, the economy, the hospital, and life as we knew it ground to a halt as everything shut down. Combined with hand washing, masking and social distancing, we were able to flatten the curve. Lives were saved, and we slowed the spread of disease.

Things opened up, and we were asked to mask, socially distance and wash our hands. The disease seemed like it was stable, and that we were going to be able to learn to live with it if we did these things.

As time moves on, we have all experienced fatigue. We miss our families, our friends and our lifestyles. We are tired of wearing a mask, washing our hands, and being socially distant. Many of us have stopped doing the things that have kept us safe.

The result is that Covid is rising all over the country. Vernon Memorial Hospital remains open and safe to care for our patients, but this surge is threatening our ability to care for you.

We write this message to get your attention. In no uncertain terms...

WE ARE IN A CRITICAL PLACE

We need **EVERYONE** to do their part to protect our community. This means wear a mask, wash your hands, socially distance. We need you to stay at home if you feel ill. We need you to avoid large community, family and friend gatherings. With deer season and Thanksgiving around the corner, we need to resist our yearnings to attend large family gatherings. **This can fan the flames and push us over edge...we are that fragile right now.**



If we fail as a community, we risk overcoming the ability of the hospital to care for patients. We risk the cancellation of surgeries and procedures. We risk losing the ability to transfer our sickest patients that need Intensive Care placement, and we risk our ability to prevent death and to protect our population. This includes our most vulnerable members who are at the greatest risk for severe disease and death: the elderly, those with autoimmune disease, diabetes and cancer.

Again, we are all fatigued. We all want our lives back. We are also hoping that you can try to understand how hard we are fighting to protect you all, but we cannot do this alone. This moment will determine whether we are going to work together to save this community from tragedy, or whether we will let our fatigue and indifference allow us to suffer like so many other communities like us have done.

We believe in this community and in our ability to take care of each other. We have seen people come together to raise money for the sick and the homeless. We have seen the saintly work of local food pantries, and we have seen the hours donated by volunteers to better our community. This has been an unprecedented time of hardship, and the end is not clearly in sight. But we have hope that we can get through this together, and that we can prevent catastrophe by doing these few very small things:

- **Wash your hands**
- **Wear a mask**
- **Socially distance**

Thank you,

Dr. Jeffrey M. Lawrence
VMH Chief of Staff

Dr. Paul Bergquist
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