



Northern Arizona
Healthcare Foundation

Thriving

nahealthfoundation.org

News from Northern Arizona
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Lasting Impact

Forging ahead to advance health and wellness

Social interaction and healthcare are evolving in ways we could not have foreseen before COVID-19. The pandemic has shifted the way we work, learn, play, and care for ourselves and others.

Amid much uncertainty, friends and neighbors stepped up to help healthcare workers and healthcare facilities fight COVID-19. With healthcare professionals bearing much of the burden of battling this new disease, the Foundation's efforts also supported our local front-line workers.

We set up the Leadership Fund for NAH Healthcare Heroes, making available more than \$1 million to healthcare workers with financial struggles due to the crisis. Contributing to this fund were Northern Arizona Healthcare, the Foundation, NAH leaders, as well as NAH colleagues. Friends and neighbors also gave generously to the heroes fund.

The fund helped those whose work hours were scaled back as NAH ceased non-essential procedures to provide for the care of COVID-19 patients and other vital emergency services.

Hundreds of organizations, businesses, schools, and individuals gave personal protective supplies



NAH President and CEO Flo Spyrow, center, accepts the gifts from Desert Financial June 26.

and meal gifts totaling more than \$100,000 in value. These in-kind donations were distributed throughout the NAH system.

The largest single donation from outside the NAH network came from neighbors down south. Valley-based Desert Financial Credit Union donated \$62,300 to support NAH healthcare heroes.

COVID-19 cases in Coconino, Navajo, and Apache counties impacted Native people more than any other population. The Foundation responded with \$90,000 in pandemic mitigation grants to the Navajo Hopi Health Foundation and The Hopi Foundation.

The pandemic's lasting impact on healthcare will be tremendous. Hence, it's more urgent than ever to shore up and advance health and well-being in northern Arizona. Northern Arizona

Healthcare Foundation is here to do just that. We are forging ahead with support for community health initiatives that address behavioral health, access to healthcare, and chronic conditions—all of which face new challenges.

We offer our sincere gratitude to all who help in our mission for healthier and thriving northern Arizona communities.

Desert Financial presents \$62,300 gift to Flagstaff Medical Center

Desert Financial, the state's largest credit union, presented Flagstaff Medical Center with a gift valued at \$62,300 to help the hospital during the coronavirus crisis.

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You have the power to enrich lives.

Join us in our mission to build a healthier northern Arizona.

Desert Financial continued

The donation includes \$30,000 for protective face masks, \$10,000 to the Leadership Fund for NAH Healthcare Heroes, 250 face shields, and 650 meal gift cards and gift bags for Flagstaff Medical Center employees.

The 81-year-old credit union has a long record of supporting community programs, especially in education and healthcare. In 2019 Desert Financial Foundation gave \$2.3 million to such efforts. The credit union, a not-for-profit co-op owned by members, is currently expanding its service regions across the state.

“We heard the reports about the dire need of the Navajo Nation. Considering that Flagstaff Medical Center serves so many in this population, and that there aren’t as many potential corporate partners in the region, we knew we could make an impact by lending support in-kind and also financially to the hospital,” said Jeff Meshey, President and CEO at Desert Financial. “We’re glad to show support for the staff and to the community at large.”

Northern Arizona Healthcare Foundation has managed material and monetary donations to assist Northern Arizona Healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic. Residents and businesses in northern Arizona have donated personal protective supplies, gift cards, and other items.

With the donation from Desert Financial, these contributions have totaled more than \$1.7 million.

“We are grateful to Desert Financial for its gift to Northern Arizona Healthcare, Flagstaff Medical Center,” said Foundation President and CEO Rick Smith. “Even in such difficult times, people find ways to help others.”

Interpreters Crucial to Quality Care

Medical terms bewilder many people.

“It’s hard enough, even if you know the English language, to decipher medical language,” said Marvin Cody, one of three full-time Navajo medical interpreters at Flagstaff Medical Center, part of the Northern Arizona Healthcare system.

“What makes us unique is that we know medical language along with the Navajo language and English language.”

Specially trained and certified, the Navajo medical interpreters primarily serve elderly Navajo patients, family members, and medical staff caring for them. The interpreter service is free and operates with a decade of support from the John and Sophie Ottens Foundation and Northern Arizona Healthcare Foundation.

In many hospitals, language barriers are overcome by a network of remote, on-demand services. The Navajo language, though, presents unique challenges best served by in-person interpreters.

First, the Navajo language is complex and was unwritten until modern times. Secondly, there are English words that have no Navajo equivalents.

“There are a lot of medical or biological terms that don’t exist in Navajo,” Cody said. “We all learn about a cell in biology. But in Navajo, there’s no word for it.”

There are cultural sensitivities, too. Discussing a medical power of attorney, advanced directives, and do not resuscitate (DNR) orders must be handled delicately.

Navajo to English Translations

azee’ííł’íní » doctor

azee’ neikaahí » nurse

hajéídíshjool » heart

ajéí yilzólíi » lung

yá’át’éeéh » hello

ahéhee’ » thank you

“Among the Navajo, it’s considered a curse if you’re telling them about death and dying,” Cody explained. “It’s like you’re prophesying their death. We must be careful in how we speak about these things.”

With Navajo and Hopi lands nearby, more than a third of patients at Flagstaff Medical Center are Native people. Physicians see the interpreters’ work as crucial.

They assist in our interactions with patients and “improve our patients’ quality of care,” said hospitalist Dr. Christina Veenstra.

If you could grace the lives of others in ways that would be most meaningful to you, what would YOU do?



Navajo medical interpreters Vernice Wagner, Marvin Cody and Gerry Fuson

A small team of fluent Navajo speakers who work other jobs at the medical center fills in when the full-time interpreters are off. Together they made nearly 6,300 patient visits in 2019.

Besides helping medical teams, the interpreters say they bring familiarity and trust to Navajo patients.

When a Navajo introduces themselves to another Navajo, they always refer to their respective clans, said interpreter Gerry Fuson. Clan names, she added, not only indicate where you come from but also the essence of who you are.

“When you establish that relationship with a patient, it helps them to loosen up, to feel more comfortable

“What makes us unique is that we know medical language along with the Navajo language and English language.”

talking with you,” added interpreter Vernice Wagner.

That closeness to patients left the team experiencing some feelings of helplessness during the coronavirus crises, Fuson said. “We were not able to help a majority of the elderly Navajo patients to understand their COVID-19 diagnosis due to most being in the critical care units.”

However, she said, they did celebrate seeing a 90-plus-year-old Navajo grandma leave the hospital after successfully fighting COVID-19.

The Ottens Foundation, which has long aided Native American causes, is closing this year. It gave a final \$500,000 gift to the Navajo medical interpreters service to benefit the program through 2024.

You can help champion this program and others that assist Native American patients by directing a gift to the Foundation's Patient Assistance Fund, www.nahealthfoundation.org/donate.

We'd love to know.

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Pandemic pushes telemental healthcare to new levels

Therapists with Northern Arizona Healthcare say COVID-19 has thrust telemental healthcare to new levels with good outcomes. And the need is growing.

“On the whole, it’s been incredibly successful,” said psychologist John Martin, a Northern Arizona Healthcare provider. “We’ve been able to reach people we wouldn’t have otherwise been able to reach because they’ve been isolated or quarantined at home.”

“This is the push we’ve needed to do telemedicine and do more of it,” said clinical manager and counselor Todd Parker of Northern Arizona Healthcare.

The escalation came swiftly across the nation.

“The coronavirus pandemic is pushing the once-niche telemedicine industry into the mainstream, testing its ability to keep up with soaring demand and forcing innovation on the fly,” said an April article in the Wall Street Journal.

Telemedicine can include a wide range of services, from an online consult for a prescription refill to remote monitoring of a patient’s vitals. With behavioral and mental healthcare, it is providing therapy or psychotherapy remotely using HIPAA-compliant video conferencing or text-based messaging.

Outpatient behavioral health services at NAH quickly went to telehealth mode once Arizona called for residents to stay home. Patients and counselors met in private sessions via the internet, group sessions were held in online meetings, and when necessary or requested, appointments were carried out by phone.



Boehne said he likes the convenience of the sessions.

“I go to a laptop, log in, and I’m in therapy.”

Another thing he appreciates is being in his environment, rather than in someone’s office.

“I feel more relaxed and comfortable this way,” he said. “If people don’t take advantage of this, they’re missing out. It’s really good therapy.”

According to the American Telemedicine Association, telehealth offers value for healthcare payers, consumers, and providers. Benefits include increased healthcare access, expanded reach of service, reduced costs, and high customer satisfaction.

The pandemic left many people experiencing high levels of psychological distress, and behavioral health professionals are seeing a surge in new patients.

“It’s an incubator for all sorts of mental health issues,” Martin said of the pandemic. “We will need to address those by increasing our access to services and improving our service delivery.”

For some patients, the use of telehealth for counseling is not new.

Randy Boehne of Cottonwood has been online for weekly counseling sessions for the past 10 months. He’s part of a NAH telehealth pilot program funded by Northern Arizona Healthcare Foundation and operating with Steps to Recovery Homes, an addiction recovery program in Cottonwood.

Northern Arizona Healthcare Foundation’s Copper Ball Online Auction took place at the end of May raising crucial funds for behavioral healthcare services at Northern Arizona Healthcare.



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We’d like to hear from you.

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