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March 30, 2020, Gallup, New Mexico — A task force has put into place an initial solution to address the need to house homeless respiratory patients needing to self-isolate while waiting for COVID-19 test results. The task force is made up of representatives from the State, County, City, Gallup Indian Medical Center (GIMC), Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services (RMCHCS) and Community Outreach Patient Empowerment (COPE).

While the local task force first began meeting, the Governor's office was also grappling with this issue at a statewide level. The local task force and the Governor's office contacted the El Rancho to see if they might help. The hotel has a separate building located across the parking lot from the main hotel called the Ranch House Motel. The El Rancho offered this as a place that could house up to 20 homeless individuals who have either tested for the coronavirus and waiting for results or who have symptoms that need daily monitoring but are not sick enough to be hospitalized.

The Ranch House Motel housed the first patients last Thursday. To qualify, patients must have a medical referral from a RMCHCS or GIMC provider. The patient must be independent with their activities of daily living, not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs nor unlikely to withdraw from alcohol or other substance.

The task force arranged for transportation from the hospitals to the Ranch House Motel. Nurses will check in on the patient by phone on a daily basis to make sure they are ok. Patients can be released from the motel room if the COVID-19 test results are negative and they have been symptom free for 24 hours. If the test is positive, patients need to be symptom free for 72 hours. Patients with respiratory symptoms but not tested, must be symptom free for 72 hours prior to release.

While the El Rancho is open for business, no one will be in contact with the patients. The rooms are completely separate from the main hotel and each room has its own outside entrance. When a provider refers a patient, the provider calls the hotel and registration takes place through the phone. El Rancho's security is ready to open the door of the room when the patient arrives. Patients are not given rooms keys and the El Rancho has hired extra security to watch the rooms at all times.

The El Rancho provides the meals, leaving them outside the door. A phone call and a knock on the door lets the patient know the meal is there. When a patient leaves, the room remains vacant for 24 hours and then cleaned thoroughly. The El Rancho has a strict cleaning protocol for the entire hotel, using CDC guidelines. These same guidelines apply for cleaning patient rooms. .

While no solution is perfect and without its bumps, it is a workable solution for now. The most important thing is to keep the patient safe and to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. The task force continues to meet to make plans should the number of patients exceed the number of rooms available.

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