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The combination of growing numbers of Covid-19 positive patients and shortages of staff have proven to be a perfect storm for Kansas hospitals. McPherson Hospital is currently dealing with a surge of patients that has the hospital beyond capacity. McPherson's Emergency Department is seeing an almost overwhelming volume of patients, while the ICU and inpatient medical/surgical units do not have enough available staff to handle any additional patients.

"The public needs to be aware that their hospital and its staff are struggling to provide what the community needs right now. Our resources are stretched beyond what they were during the surge last year. This is a serious situation," said Chris Stipe, President and CEO at McPherson Center for Health.

Patients who present to the Emergency Department and need admission to the hospital are, at times, being held and cared for in the ER while they wait for a staffed bed to become available upstairs. "This backs up the ER and puts stress on our ability to care for patients as we normally would," said Dara Reese, RN, Director of Emergency Services.

Outside of McPherson, larger medical centers are not readily accepting patient transfers of any kind. This means the more serious patients who present to the ER and need to be transferred to a higher level of care, or need specialty care not available locally, are not getting the care they need quickly enough. Reese added, "When we cannot get patients transferred, they are not getting desperately needed care. It is heartbreaking and frustrating when you can't get patients to the specialty care they need."

At the hospital's outpatient clinic, McPherson Medical and Surgical Associates, the clinic nurses and staff are stepping up to provide the availability of antibody treatments to Covid positive patients who are candidates for such treatments. Monoclonal antibody infusions are currently the best tool that the hospital can offer COVID positive patients for preventing progression to severe disease. And qualified, clinic staff is being tapped to help relieve inpatient hospital and ER staff.

"Our entire staff is pulling together incredibly well. Hospital caregivers are feeling overwhelmed, so our clinic staff is going to try to provide some relief. We are one big team, and we want to be here for the community," said Dr. Carl Turner, Family Practice/Obstetrics physician.

Even with help from the clinic, hospital staff remains challenged with too many patients and limited resources. What can you do to help the hospital staff and your community? McPherson Medical and Surgical Associates suggests....

- First, get vaccinated. Here in McPherson, you can call your primary care doctor or the health department to schedule your vaccination or booster shot. Or get it at a local pharmacy.
- Wear a mask, wash your hands frequently, practice social distancing and consider the risks of attending large gatherings.
- If you are sick, stay home. Monitor your symptoms and communicate with your primary care provider about whether you need to be tested for Covid-19. People with high-risk conditions should test early after onset of symptoms so that they can receive monoclonal antibodies if appropriate to decrease risk that the illness will progress to a severe illness that requires hospitalization.
- If you think you need to be tested for Covid there are over-the-counter tests available at pharmacies and grocery stores. These are especially good for those who have been exposed but have no symptoms, or for those who want to test before being around fragile loved ones. For people with COVID symptoms, contact your primary care provider. Drive up testing is available at the hospital and at the fire department.
- If you are experiencing significant symptoms, you may need to be seen by a physician or provider, especially if you have pre-existing health conditions. Call your primary care provider or visit McPherson Urgent Care. Use the Emergency Department as a last resort.

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