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U.S. Army Corps Of Engineers: Panacea For Hospitals

STAY HOME TO
STOP THE SPREAD
OF CORONAVIRUS.

NYC

The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) surprised us all, especially our Nation's hospital system, not prepared for a pandemic. Hospitals throughout the United States, especially in New York State, are overwhelmed with patients with Coronavirus symptoms and cannot provide them beds.



Tara Clampett, Intensive Care Unit (ICU), Registered Nurse with Long Island Community Hospital. Credit: Tara Clampett.

"We are inundated!" said Tara Clampett, Intensive Care Unit, Registered Nurse with Long Island Community Hospital. "A majority of them are going into respiratory distress and are being intubated. Even if they get stable, many are not stable enough to leave."

She says that with many Coronavirus patients coming to the hospital, this leaves less space for patients with other health conditions, so less attention will be given to their health issues.

The hospital did all it could do to create more patient space, but it is not enough.

To relieve the burden of New York State hospitals, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District, is collaborating with other agencies to convert existing buildings into alternate care facilities to provide hospitals extra space to care for Coronavirus and non-Coronavirus patients.

"What the Army Corps is doing is making me hopeful. We are overwhelmed and we can use all the help we can get!," said Clampett.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is performing this work as part of a national Federal Emergency Management Agency mission. The Army Corps is working in collaboration with FEMA, Department of Defense, and other federal, state and local partners.

In New York State, this work is considered especially critical. The state, primarily New York City, is considered the epicenter in the Nation. There are more virus cases and deaths in the state than anywhere else in the Nation. At the time of this article's publishing there were 222,284 cases and 14,636 deaths.

To accommodate all of these cases, it is estimated that the state may need more than 100,000 hospital beds for Coronavirus patients, compared to the state's current capacity of 53,000 beds.

To help New York State hospitals deal with this, Army Corps' New York District volunteers are working 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They are locating existing buildings that can be converted into these alternate care facilities and then they are designing and constructing them.

Four key locations have been identified and they include the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York City, Westchester County Center in White Plains, New York, Stony Brook University in Stony Brook, New York and the State University of New York in Old Westbury, New York.

Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, New York City

The first alternate care facility to be constructed – and completed in one week – was the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, located in midtown New York City. The center is a well-known location for expos and business events.

The center's great size of 1,800,000-square-feet, seemed like a good location for an alternate care facility.

The Army Corps converted the center's multiple floors of space into an alternate care facility, providing beds for more than 2,500 Coronavirus and non-Coronavirus patients.

The facility was designed and constructed to resemble a hospital setting. There are rows of individual patient care units or rooms that include beds, privacy curtains, medical supplies and equipment. In addition, there is overhead lighting, restrooms, showers, nursing stations, food service and an computer station, powered by multiple generators.

While touring the center, Chief of Engineers Lt. Gen. Todd T. Semonite said that in order to quickly and efficiently get these centers up and running for a peak in Coronavirus cases, a "super simple solution" had to be applied.

He said the Javits Center's design will serve as the model for other care facilities being constructed throughout the nation.

Charles Paray, Lead Architect, New York District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said, "I volunteered to work on Jacob Javits and the other alternate care locations because I thought I could help make a difference."

Westchester County Convention Center, White Plains, New York

The center is known for its large gatherings for basketball tournaments and live shows.

The Army Corps is converting 60,000 square-feet of the center into an alternate care facility, providing 110 beds for Coronavirus patients.

Fifty-four of these beds will be located inside the center and fifty-six will be located in a temporary tent structure located in the center's parking lot across from the center.

Both areas will be designed and constructed to resemble a hospital setting. There will be rows of individual patient care units or rooms that will include beds, privacy walls, medical supplies and equipment, and the rooms will be equipped to provide oxygen/medical gas for patients.

In addition, there will be overhead lighting, restrooms, showers, nursing stations, food service, and an computer station, powered by multiple generators.

The facility will also be equipped with an isolation exhaust fan with HEPA filtration located outside of the facility, so that contaminated exhaust air within the facility is discharged to outside the facility.

"I am working on the Westchester Center because I want to help to provide additional hospital space for nurses and doctors to take care of our neighbors who have been diagnosed with the Coronavirus," said Patrick Nejad, Quality Assurance Representative, New York District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York

The Army Corps is converting 255,676-square-feet of the university's campus to provide care for 1,028 non-Coronavirus patients and low acuity Coronavirus patients.

They are building five climate-controlled tents on an open field on the campus grounds.

Inside these tents it will resemble a hospital setting. There will be rows of individual patient care units or rooms that will include beds, privacy walls, medical supplies and equipment.

In addition, there will be overhead lighting, restrooms, showers, nursing stations, food service, and an computer station, powered by multiple generators.

Anthony Ciorra, Mission Manager, New York District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who is working on the Stony Brook Alternate Care Center said, "My brother contracted the Coronavirus in March and become very sick. He developed pneumonia and was admitted to a hospital for 10 days."

He said, "This is an unprecedented time in all our lives and I wanted do my small part in making a difference in a monumental effort to fight this virus."

State University of New York at Old Westbury, New York

At the university, the Army Corps will provide beds for 1,024 Coronavirus and non-Coronavirus patients.

They are building four climate-controlled tents in a large expanse of athletic fields and another unit in a gymnasium.

Inside these tents it will resemble a hospital setting. There will be rows of individual patient care units or rooms that will include beds, privacy walls, medical supplies and equipment.

In addition, there will be overhead lighting, restrooms, showers, nursing stations, food service, an computer station, powered by multiple generators, and overhead cameras to enable medical staff to monitor patients.

"William Maher, Mission Manager, New York District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who is working on the State University of New York at Old Westbury Alternate Care Center said, "We're meeting the challenge of building a high-quality patient care facility in a very short period of time."

Army Corps personnel are used to volunteering for national missions. Nejdand volunteered for recovery operations for Hurricane Sandy and 9/11. He said, "During missions, I am always impressed with the Army Corps ability to quickly mobilize personnel with local knowledge with technical experts nationwide to provide comprehensive response with methods to maintain accountability of all costs and scheduled completions."

These volunteers give more than just their time for these missions. "A lot of people are putting not only their lives, but the lives of their love ones at risk to get this mission executed," said Paray.

Presently, some of these alternate care facilities are completed and are assisting hospitals throughout New York State, lessening some of the burden on their medical staff.

Not only are hospitals grateful for the Army Corp's work, so are the Coronavirus patients.

Kevin McGann, who was hospitalized with Coronavirus symptoms said, "Based on all of the numbers coming out of New York State's Governor Cuomo's daily briefings, I support the Army Corps mission 100-percent."

The 49-year-old New York City resident added, "Use tents, convert dormitories and hotels, and do whatever needs to be done to prepare for the possible onslaught of patients. Worst case is we look back and realize we did not need all of them, but better to have them than have to decide who lives and who dies."

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