March 13, 2020

Hospice of Santa Barbara, Inc. (HSB) has been actively monitoring the Coronavirus situation and has been developing a response and mitigation plan. The situation continues to evolve rapidly and we will adjust our plan as new information becomes available.

HSB endeavors to take proactive steps to help protect its staff, clients, patients, volunteers, and community members. As per the CDC, “From the limited data that is available, it is possible that older adults, and persons who have underlying chronic medical conditions, such as immunocompromising conditions, may be at risk for more severe outcomes.” This describes the largest demographic of people served by HSB. Other considerations are the extended incubation period of the virus where people can be infected with the virus and be asymptomatic; this makes it difficult to know who has the virus. Limited testing availability for the virus greatly adds to our community’s uncertainty.

The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department urged businesses, agencies, and other organizations in our county to develop a “social distancing plan” (see March 7 SBCPHD press release) to limit person-to-person contact; this type of plan will likely play an integral role in reducing the number of people potentially exposed to the virus and therefore slowing community spread. We considered how we can continue to serve our community while also taking preemptive protective measures.

With these factors in mind, HSB is taking the proactive step of implementing its social distancing plan sooner rather than later. Indicators suggest that it is only a matter of time before there are confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our community. Community experts have recently suggested that there are likely cases of virus in our community, yet to be confirmed. Again, the concern is that we already serve an at-risk population through our Bereavement, Patient Care Services (PCS), Volunteer, and Community Education programs and we want to do our part in preventing the possible spread of this virus. As a result, we are modifying the ways in which we can meet the needs of our patients and clients to limit person-to-person contact.

Beginning Tuesday, March 10, 2020 through March 31, 2020 at a minimum, HSB will activate solutions to ensure continuity of care within our Bereavement, Patient Care Services, and Community Engagement programs. HSB’s Bereavement program will shift from in-office and on-school campus counseling to phone therapy. Those served through HSB’s Patient Care Services program will also be supported through phone or virtual means and through modified services from our volunteers. HSB’s community events, meetings, and gatherings will be suspended through this period and future events will be assessed.

HSB’s office will remain open during this period but closed to the general public. HSB staff will be in the office to answer phone calls and we will keep the operation moving as smoothly as possible. HSB staff have been encouraged to telecommute to the greatest extent possible in order to limit the number of people in the office.
As this is a rapidly evolving situation, it is unknown if these measures will be extended beyond March 31 or altered to address new issues. HSB will continue to monitor the situation and the response plan will be adjusted accordingly. As the demand for HSB services may increase as the result of this pandemic, HSB will be looking to meet those emerging needs through development of new and creative approaches.

In past community disasters, HSB has quickly responded to serve the community’s needs. HSB believes that by taking the above actions, we are proactively addressing this current community crisis.

It is our hope that through these service changes we will continue to meet the needs of the community while also doing our part to stem the tide of the Coronavirus pandemic. We encourage other agencies, businesses, and organizations in our community to consider the importance of social distancing as per the recommendation of the SB County Public Health Department. Collectively, our efforts will have a significant and meaningful impact.

For questions on this matter, please contact our office at 805-563-8820.