

# Treasure Coast Hospice is keeping hope alive in these troubled times

BY PATRICK McCALLISTER | Correspondent

Depending on how you count it hospice goes back millennia ... or to about the late 1960s. Either way, hospice has seen outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics and never backed away – not even from SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19.

Treasure Coast Hospice is no exception.

“Our team, it’s what they’re life is devoted to – taking care of patients at the end of life no matter how that end is coming,” said Jackie Kendrick, CEO of Treasure Coast Hospice.

Treasure Coast Hospice has inpatient buildings at its Mayes Center, 1201 SE Indian St., Stuart. It has converted one into a COVID-19 care facility with eight beds.

“It’s been pretty steady with at least one patient in there, but it’s been as many as eight,” Kendrick said.

On March 2 the Florida Department of Health announced COVID-19 was in the state. A week later, Gov. Ron DeSantis declared a state of emergency that included every county. By St. Patrick’s Day St. Lucie County partially activated its emergency operations center. At the beginning of April, DeSantis issued executive orders that shut down non-essential businesses. Florida is now in Phase 2 of the “Safe. Smart. Step-by-Step. Plan for Florida’s Recovery” reopening. It is also in a rapid uptick of detected COVID-19 cases.



Jackie Kendrick.

Along with the infections, hospitalizations and deaths, SARS-Cov-2 has brought widespread shortages of medical supplies, risks of asymptomatic carriers unknowingly spreading the novel coronavirus, and other challenges.

“It has affected every aspect of our business,” Kendrick said.

“It’s something none of us have seen before.”

Treasure Coast Hospice started in 1982, so it has squared off with some of the most frightening things nature has served up for the last four decades.

“Back in the AIDS epidemic (of the 1980s), it was hospice that stepped up,” said Kendrick.

Hospice has also faced down the 2002-2004 SARS pandemic that largely bypassed the United States, the 2014 MERS outbreak that gave Florida a scare when it was reported present in Orlando, and the 2009 H1N1, which had about 3,700 reported cases in Florida. Others, such as tuberculosis, are afoot all the time. SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 pandemic

is, indisputably, the most pervasive and disruptive any have dealt with in modern history.

“There were massive protective equipment shortages, but we’ve been able to overcome that,” Kendrick said. “This is our new normal, so we have to learn to live within that.”

At the heart of hospice is compassion and comfort. COVID-19 with its social distancing strikes at that. Nevertheless, Kendrick said as Treasure Coast Hospice has learned to navigate the coronavirus world along with everybody else, it has been able to unite those in palliative care before their deaths with family members.

“We explain to the families the risks and they have to wear (personal protective equipment),” said Kendrick.

Things like comforting family members and loved ones have also taken on new dynamics. Gone, for now, are the days of taking hands and hugging.

“People are open now to doing it differently,” said Kendrick. “We’ve adapted as much as we can to the situation.”

The hospice has also learned a lot about how to use technology to help keep families united during palliative care.

Kendrick said the community has seen and helped hospice’s efforts to prevent the spread of and

care for those with COVID-19.

“Volunteers have made us over 3,000 masks,” she said.

Those aren’t for the professionals in or potentially in contact with COVID-19 patients. They’re for office workers, family members and others. Kendrick said she’s aware many are hurting during the pandemic, but being a not-for-profit Treasure Coast Hospice needs financial help more than ever.

“We are paying extra for a lot of our protective equipment,” she said. Kendrick added, “This community is amazing. They’ve been incredible.”

One thing Kendrick asked **St. Lucie Voice** to do is make sure people understand talking about hospice is about hope.

“So often people hear the word ‘hospice’ and think death,” she said. “It’s about quality of life. It’s making every minute the best it can be.”

To learn about helping Treasure Coast Hospice, visit [www.treasurecoasthealth.org](http://www.treasurecoasthealth.org). ■

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