

To prepare for COVID-19, Vista Health System leaders zeroed in on critical care nurses. They recognized early on—when known cases were just a blip—that staffing up these nurses would be central to fighting the virus.

Vista Health System serves the Lake County area through Vista Medical Center East in Waukegan, an ambulatory care center, freestanding emergency center and more.

In early March, a table-top drill at the hospital resulted in a COVID-19 surge plan and a plan for increasing critical care nurses. The surgical services department stepped up, offering to help in multiple capacities.

The hospital's open heart surgical team and post-anesthesia care unit immediately embedded in the ICU for intensive training with the ICU clinical educator. The cross-training, combined with the flexibility of staff, expanded the capacity of Vista Medical Center East to care for COVID-19 patients.

Just six days later, in late March, the preparation paid off. The hospital found itself in the midst of a critical care surge, with its usual ICU patient volume doubling almost overnight—then tripling.

Alongside ICU staff, Vista's skilled surgical services staff cared for extremely critical, intubated COVID-19 patients. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Vista managed 10 to 12 ICU patients a day. With surgical services staff working in critical care, Vista can now manage 36 ICU patients.

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