Key elements needed in setting up designated COVID-19 unit
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In an effort to rapidly provide specialized care for patients with coronavirus-like symptoms while protecting the safety of health care workers, doctors at Wake Forest Baptist Health created a special respiratory isolation unit from an existing 24-bed medical-surgical unit in the hospital in Winston-Salem.

The framework for this Person Under Investigation (PUI) unit was published in the April 13 issue of The Hospitalist, the official publication of the Society of Hospital Medicine.

"Given the novelty and seriousness of COVID-19 as well as the evolving guidelines, a lot of effort went into creating this unit quickly," said Padageshwar Sunkara, M.D., assistant professor of internal medicine at Wake Forest School of Medicine, part of Wake Forest Baptist Health.

"We wanted to move anyone suspected of having the virus directly to the isolation unit to minimize cross-contamination with other patients and staff."

To accommodate patients from all specialties, the rooms were retrofitted with additional features such as dialysis access.

In addition, specific medical teams were designated to provide patient care on the unit and trained in the proper ways to use and conserve personal protective equipment. Unit staff established a number of measures to minimize exposure risk to providers and other patients, such as limiting entry to patient rooms to only critical staff directly involved in patient care.

Sunkara, medical director for the PUI unit, said that staff members were able to get the unit established within one week, even before the first case was detected on March 24 at Wake Forest Baptist, and he hopes this model will be useful to other institutions.

Provided by Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center