An inside look in a COVID-19 unit at a Valleywise hospital

ABC15 gets a rare inside look at a Valley COVID unit.

By: Mike Pelton

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PHOENIX — The sounds of beeping machines and the hustle of nurses donned in full PPE take center stage on a COVID unit at a Valley hospital.
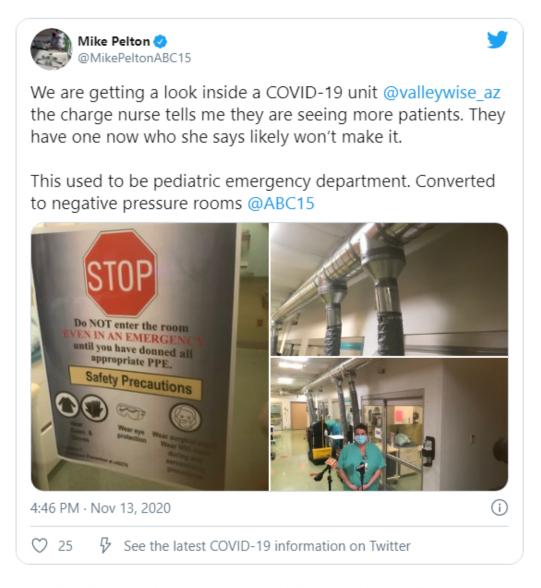
ABC15 was granted a rare look inside a COVID unit at Valleywise Health Medical Center on Friday. Valleywise has three COVID units, with a current total of around 30 coronavirus patients, a number officials said is much higher than in recent weeks.

"This is looking a little bit like the beginning of Summer did," said Charge Nurse Jennifer Granger. "So that's a little disconcerting for us."

Granger told ABC15 her particular unit had three patients Friday afternoon, down from eight earlier in the morning, as patients are transferred to other parts of the hospital. The number is constantly

changing.

"The patients that are here right now are pretty sick," Granger said. "I would say one of our patients is probably the sickest patient in the hospital. He requires a tremendous amount of nursing care. The nurse for that room is in the room pretty much all day long with him."

The particular COVID unit ABC15 was granted access to used to be a pediatric emergency department. Large pipes now run along the ceiling as the facility converted the 12 rooms into negative pressure rooms for coronavirus patients.

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We are getting a look inside a COVID-19 unit @valleywise_az the charge nurse tells me they are seeing more patients. They have one now who she says likely won't make it.

This used to be pediatric emergency department. Converted to negative pressure rooms @ABC15

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"In these rooms what we want to do is as the patients are in there exhaling, we want to take that air and vent it outside the building," said Chief Medical Officer Dr. Michael White.

Dr. White said on Friday, for the first time since roughly late August, Valleywise activated their incident command, which helps manage the uptick in COVID-19 patients.

"As we continue to see the case counts rise, I anticipate that our resources may become constrained," he said. "We are prepared to activate our surge plans if we were to need to have them. If these case counts continue to rise we likely may find ourselves in that position."

As ABC15 was inside the COVID unit, nurses in full PPE routinely shuffled around the floor, checking on various patients and clearly focused on the task at hand.

The potential for a surge of additional patients, like what occurred over the Summer, isn't lost on them either.

"I think we're ready to do it again if we have to," Granger said. "That's what we're here for."

Granger also noted the toughest part of the job, having to see family members say goodbye to their loved ones over a video call.

"That's the worst part," she said. "I'm happy to be in a patient room for 12 hours in full PPE and take care of them. I'm OK with no breaks, any of that kind of stuff. To have to tell a family member that their loved one is going to die and they can't be present when that happens is...that's awful."