



NCH President & CEO Gary Shaw Statement to Select Board | April 29, 2020

As President of Nantucket Cottage Hospital, I would like to clarify and expand upon our position going forward. It is our mission to ensure the health and safety of all Islanders. While we recommend safe behaviors, we do not regulate or enforce any actions by Nantucketers. Throughout the course of this pandemic we have offered input on safe practices and safe behaviors, and Nantucket's residents have demonstrated remarkable maturity and patience in committing to actions that have proven to benefit the island as a whole.

By way of background, in early February the coronavirus began to spread beyond China to Europe and ultimately to the United States. As challenging a problem as this was for our country as a whole, Nantucket was faced with some uniquely challenging circumstances. If COVID-19 took hold, it could be significant given the size of our hospital, the limitations of caring for patients during a surge, getting large numbers of people off the island if necessary, and the potential that our health system would be challenged and could not handle a surge coming from the island. As the disease morphed from an outbreak to a pandemic, Nantucket was facing a significant healthcare challenge.

By early March, the hospital took as aggressive a stand as possible to discourage visitors from coming to the island and for those already here to self-quarantine and to encourage physical distancing and other appropriate precautions. As we observed travel from several COVID-19 hotspots in the Northeast in March, our concerns multiplied, as did our guidance to restrict people's interaction and activities on the island.

Today, thanks to our remarkably gifted staff, the incredible support, partnership, and professionalism from Partners Healthcare, now known as Mass General Brigham, and the impressive compliance from Nantucketers to respect and adhere to prudent social behavior, we currently have had only 12 confirmed cases of COVID-19 on the island that we know of. In fact, we experienced 23 days with no cases.

As we approach the summer season, we are faced with a new set of challenges. We know there are many who believe we must continue to restrict activity and commerce on the island with the goal of keeping the virus in check. We also know there are many others who would like the economy to resume immediately in an effort to save jobs and businesses which are now threatened. It is my belief that these two schools of thought are not necessarily mutually exclusive and that we may be able achieve both of these objectives. The process of finding the balance is the purview of the Town of Nantucket, within the parameters of the state's recommendations and regulations, and in keeping with advice from health care experts, legal experts, and the best interests of the community.

There is little question that by maintaining tight reins on social behavior we can keep the virus in check, we have done it before, and we can do it again. But, in that same vein, living in a bubble is not living, and we are focusing our thinking at the hospital on the management of COVID-19 as the summer begins and how we will adapt depending upon the actions taken by Governor Baker after May 18th.



Of all the communities I have ever experienced, and I have lived worldwide, through my lens Nantucket is a place where people exhibit a level of cooperation, cohesiveness and consideration of one another that is unlike any other community. While the summer population is far larger than the year-round residents, it is my belief they too, by and large, understand the Nantucket ethic which is what makes Nantucket, Nantucket.

We are at a critical point for this island, whereby continuing to clamp down on activity in the name of stopping any and all exposure to COVID-19, we risk crippling our economy both now and for years to come and causing a different set of problems that could in and of themselves impact the well-being of our residents. It is my opinion, that we can achieve an intelligent balance toward the management of COVID-19 and protect the health of everyone who both live and visit here and keep commerce alive to prevent economic collapse.

Moving forward it will be important to rely on the intelligence and thoughtfulness of Nantucketers and the spirit of cooperation that this island has demonstrated time after time to determine our next steps. We are asking Nantucketers to continue following our guidance which includes:

- Appropriate physical distancing by staying at least six feet apart
- Wearing masks in public when physical distancing is difficult
- Diligent hand-washing for at least 20 seconds
- Not gathering in large groups or hosting large events
- Disinfecting much-used surfaces with an EPA-certified disinfectant
- Limiting trips to the grocery store and other essential trips
- And adhering to the Governor's orders, which will be adjusted on May 18th

If we all do these things, we feel that we can keep COVID-19 under control.

Personal responsibility, self-discipline, respect for your neighbor, and compliance with public health and medical advice may be the most powerful medicine we have at this moment to manage the disease. We have as a community proven our ability to work together and our ultra- modern new hospital would not have been possible without the island working together for a common good. The hospital is as ready as a community hospital can be and prepared to address the tasks ahead. All of our Nantucketers, both on and off Island, granted us precious time to prepare. During that time, we have developed a thorough surge plan to expand our capacity within our walls if necessary, expanded the criteria for COVID-19 ambulatory testing at our drive-through to include any individual with any symptom of the disease, as well as training 26 NCH staff members in contact tracing to assist the Town Health Department if needed. We are ready.

If COVID-19 does flare up on Nantucket, you can rest assured the Nantucket Cottage Hospital will take immediate action that may involve recommendations to reinstate certain restrictions. At this moment, with support from Mass General Brigham, State and local health officials, I think it's important that we closely monitor the orders from Governor Baker's office and work together locally on the island to strike the right balance between health and safety and preserving our economy and livelihoods. We will continue to issue common sense guidelines that we expect everyone to adhere to. We have already shown that we can do this together, and I expect that will continue as we move forward together.