



Nantucket can be proud of its leaders for acting early and decisively to protect the community from the threat of coronavirus, and I am in awe of the collective actions of all island residents to physically distance, stay home, wash their hands diligently, and adhere to the emergency orders put in place. Thanks to those actions, to date we have been able to limit the deadly impact of this virus and prevent significant community spread on the island. So far, so good.

But we know it takes only one person to change that. It takes only one person who may be carrying the virus unknowingly without showing symptoms to set us on a dangerous path of seeing more cases, more severe illness, and potentially a surge of COVID-19 patients that could threaten to overwhelm the healthcare resources of our remote island.

The coronavirus is amongst us and it remains a threat to our community. While we have welcomed the recent streak of days without a confirmed new case, we should not let this good news allow us to become complacent. Our island and our economy are tied to the mainland in so many ways, and we can all see what is happening just a short boat ride away on Cape Cod, in Boston, and New York where the coronavirus continues to have a major impact.

The number of COVID-19 cases continue to rise statewide in Massachusetts, and sadly, we have witnessed the death toll from the virus as it grows larger. While the relatively small number of cases on Nantucket may give us some sense of comfort, we are in the eye of the storm and we cannot let our guard down.

Even as we work together with the town to refine its plans to reopen the island and our local economy in a measured, responsible, and safe manner, now is the time to ***double-down*** on what we know has worked. We know physical distancing and staying home have worked. We know wearing masks, hand-washing and limiting our trips to the grocery store have worked. These efforts aren't flashy, or popular, and they certainly aren't fun, but they work. That being said, we can't afford to let up at this point. We need to keep going, while at the same time continue planning how to stay safe in the "new normal" when our local and state leaders decide it is time to loosen the current restrictions.

Together with our colleagues at Martha's Vineyard Hospital, we ask those who have a permanent residence off-island to please make the decision to continue staying off island a bit longer for the sake of their safety and those already on our island. This is America and we all depend on each other in so many positive ways. We will all be together soon, but the time is not now. The islands are not a safe haven during a pandemic and now is not the time to potentially strain limited island resources by increasing the island's population. Your hospital serves a remote community and



our diverse population well, but it was not built to simultaneously handle a rapid increase in population while responding to a global pandemic. The surge in Boston is expected to reach its peak over the next week. Whether or not that has any impact on Nantucket remains to be seen.

Our plans to handle a potential surge of coronavirus cases at Nantucket Cottage Hospital while also caring for non-COVID-19 patients are well developed, and are a testament to the dedicated team here at NCH. Since early January we have planned for and taken appropriate measures to equip and protect both our community and the staff members of NCH. Early in the crisis we isolated potential COVID-19 patients at a main entrance drive-through evaluation site to ensure the safety of our patients and the healthcare workers inside the building. We also created a dedicated high-risk screening zone in our Emergency Department and inpatient floor to isolate patients who require hospitalization. These measures have worked well for the island, and Nantucket Cottage Hospital remains open to the community for care of non-COVID-19 health issues.

We know everyone on and off the island are making difficult sacrifices during this challenging time, and we are grateful. Together with the town, we are looking ahead to when it is safe and rational to recommend removal of some of the restrictions, but we urge everyone to continue to stay home, venture out only for essential trips while wearing a mask, and adhere to the measures put in place to protect our community.

We all have a part to play. Let's not let our good work be for naught, because remember, it takes only one person.

Gary Shaw, FACHE
President & CEO
Nantucket Cottage Hospital