



June 24, 2021

Contact: **Ryan Mielke**
Director of Public Affairs
(915) 521-7656 rmielke@umcelpaso.org
(915) 493-5235

Press Advisory:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**NATIONAL HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION HONORS
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER OF EL PASO
WITH GAGE AWARD FOR COVID-19 PROGRAM**

EL PASO, Texas – America’s Essential Hospitals, a national trade association, has recognized University Medical Center of El Paso (UMC) for its effort to allow family visitation, after restrictions began to lift, for those who were critically ill in our COVID-19 ICU.

America's Essential Hospitals, which represents more than 300 hospitals that care for low-income and other marginalized people, recognized UMC with a 2021 Gage Award for COVID-19 Innovations. The association presented the award June 24 at its virtual annual conference. UMC was recognized for its exceptionally innovative effort to aid both patients and their families.

“We are so proud of the hardworking professionals/heroes who day-in and day-out came in to care for our community and never wavered in their commitment during the pandemic. They went above and beyond in looking for every possible way to help patients and families during this trying time,” said Jacob Cintron, President and CEO of the El Paso County Hospital District.



UMC's Eric Johansen and the Gage Award.

“We were the first in the city to allow routine, in-person visits by family members to critically ill COVID-19 patients,” said Eric Johansen, Assistant Chief Nursing Officer and initiator of the program. “I did not want the patients to feel as though they had been forgotten as studies have shown that having a family member by your side, if even for a brief period, helps with recovery and positive outcomes. We did everything possible to keep the family member safe and healthy by providing the proper equipment to make the visits a reality.”

COVID-19 patients in El Paso and throughout the nation were unable to have family visitation leaving them without the comfort and touch of loved ones. Although virtual visits with family were taking place, nothing replaces a loved one’s presence. UMC’s innovative visitation program for these patients was tested during the week of Christmas 2020. As state/federal restrictions eased and the high rate of new positive cases began to trend down, UMC El Paso piloted the program to allow the family to visit hospitalized loved ones once a week for two hours at a time. Specific criteria was established and used in identifying eligible patients for the pilot program. Qualifying patients had to have been hospitalized for 20 days or more. Family members must be over the age of 18, not be in the ten-day window for self-quarantine due to a positive COVID test, and pass the hospital's screening criteria at entry. Visiting family was required to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) provided by the hospital and tolerate the use of a power air-purifying respirator used to safeguard against contaminated air (PAPR).

Throughout the duration of the pandemic, thus far, UMC’s program has benefited approximately 90 COVID-19 patients who were receiving critical care. To date, UMC has admitted more than 3,125 COVID-19 cases for inpatient care. “The COVID-19 pandemic and acts of racial injustice that have marked the past year magnified the role of our hospitals as healing forces in their communities, both inside and outside the hospital walls,” said America’s Essential Hospitals President and CEO Bruce Siegel, MD, MPH. “We are proud to recognize UMC and our other awardees for their continued efforts to innovate with limited resources and during challenging times.”

###

About UMC: For 106 years, University Medical Center of El Paso (UMC) has been providing exceptionally high quality care for the entire El Paso region. UMC is home to the region's only Level I Trauma Center, the only Joint Commission-Certified Comprehensive Level I Stroke Center, the only Level IV Maternal Critical Care Center, and the only Certified Baby Friendly Hospital. UMC's mission is to Heal, to Serve and to Educate. For more UMC News, go to: <http://www.umcelpaso.org> (News Releases at bottom of main page.)

###