



MEDIA RELEASE

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Ascension Travelers Provide Much-Needed Support to Seniors During COVID-19

Clifton, Ill. Nursing Home Benefits from Staffing Program

St. Louis, Mo. - Leaving your home and families for weeks -- or even a month -- to provide healthcare support during the COVID-19 pandemic may seem daunting to many. But for others, it's a way to use their skills and help colleagues in need during an unprecedented time.

Since mid-April, nearly 100 registered nurses, patient care technicians (PCTs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and housekeepers have packed their bags and headed to the midwest to provide much-needed support to seniors in Ascension Living communities. These associates are participating in the Ascension Critical Staffing Travel Program and have volunteered to temporarily relocate to other areas to serve communities in need.

Ascension Living offers independent, assisted living, memory care, short-term rehabilitation and long-term care in 11 states and Washington, D.C. The nearly 100 workers are from other Ascension Living communities, as well as Ascension, a faith-based healthcare organization with more than 2,600 sites of care in the United States.

Nursing homes have dealt with COVID-19 cases among residents and staff. These workers, known as "Ascension travelers," have volunteered to provide much-needed relief to fellow associates working at capacity to manage surges in senior communities.

"The support has been amazing from Ascension staff who have been willing to leave their jobs and families to help us provide uninterrupted, quality care when we needed it the most," said Danny Stricker, president, Ascension Living. "We can't thank these associates enough for their help. Their skills, selflessness and flexibility have been indispensable to our teams, and the well-being of our most vulnerable residents."

Initially, the travelers could sign up for two-week assignments, but some extended it to a month with approval from their supervisors. Travel, food and lodging are paid for by Ascension Living.

Tonya Doremus, LPN, who works at Ascension Living Borgess Place (a skilled nursing and rehabilitation community) in Kalamazoo, Mich., received several emails about staffing needs at Ascension Living communities and decided to participate. Doremus, who is married and the mother of four grown children and four grandchildren, drove three hours southwest to begin work at Merkle-Knipprath Nursing Home in Clifton, Ill.

"I wasn't nervous about working on a COVID-19 unit and helping out," said Doremus, 49, who said it has been a positive experience. "I'm in good health and I would want people to help my family." Doremus works closely with

other nurses, staff members and doctors to provide care, medications and other medically necessary treatments during this time of need at the community.

With the restricted units, the nurse is among the limited, dedicated staff who cares for and interacts with COVID-19 residents. “Patients don’t get to see their families or loved ones so I try to make it special for them,” said Doremus, noting visitors are not allowed on the unit. “I’ve made birthday cards, done a little dance to make them smile or even sung a little to brighten their days.”

Doremus, who has the support of her family, works 8- or 12-hour shifts and cannot leave the unit until it’s time to head to the hotel. Her assignment was for two weeks.

“It’s amazing meeting new people here and the team has made me feel right at home – not awkward or out of place,” Doremus said.

With this program, acute care nurses and staff go through a one-day orientation on-site when they arrive, which includes computer training on the electronic health record system, as well as learning protocols for the specific senior community.

“Surprisingly, when we sent out emails, staff dropped everything to sign up – and some have not been in COVID-19 units in their current jobs,” said Kristie Krajenka, senior director, Clinical Operations, Ascension Living, who manages the program. “We had furloughed associates who tested positive at our communities, and because of outbreaks, we needed more help. It’s really been a blessing for Ascension Living.”

Ascension travelers have provided support to Ascension Living’s Villa Franciscan (Joliet), Sherbrooke Village and Lansdowne Place (St. Louis, Mo), Merkle-Knipprath Nursing Home (Clifton, Ill.), Our Lady of Victory (Bourbonnais, Ill.), Maryhaven Nursing/Rehab Center (Glenview, Ill.), Resurrection Nursing and Rehabilitation Center (Park Ridge, Ill.) and Sacred Heart Home (Avila, Ind.)

“None of this would be possible without Ascension because they are the ones caring enough about all of their communities to send us where we are needed,” said Doremus. “They even went above and beyond to provide my family at home with dinner of their choice delivered to them last night. They are heroes as well.”

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About us

Ascension Living, based in St. Louis and part of Ascension, is a mission-driven senior living provider deeply connected to our Catholic faith that cares for the physical, mental, spiritual and social well-being of all individuals we serve. Our Mission calls us to provide spiritually centered, holistic care to seniors, particularly those most in need. We offer a wide range of programs tailored to meet the unique needs of older adults. Regardless of everyone’s stage in life, our goal is to provide seniors with opportunities designed to make their lives joyful, enriching and satisfying. With communities in 12 states and the District of Columbia, our ministries are continually developing and adopting new best practices in care that enhance the experiences of our residents, program participants and patients. Learn more at www.ascensionliving.org.

Ascension operates more than 2,600 sites of care – including 151 hospitals and more than 50 senior living facilities – in 21 states and the District of Columbia, while providing a variety of services including physician practice management, venture capital investing, investment management, biomedical engineering, facilities management, clinical care management, information services, risk management, and contracting through Ascension’s own group purchasing organization.