

Updated 3/20/20

Dear members of the Austen Riggs Center community,

First and above all, thank you for your patience, perseverance, and collaboration as we face an unprecedented global health emergency together. I especially want to thank participants in the COVID-19 Committee whose tireless efforts have helped transform our clinical system and our operations in important ways in little more than a week. We have made progress, but there is much more to do, especially when it comes to getting the word out to all of you. That is my next major goal.

In order to protect the health and safety of our patients, staff, and the surrounding community, we are implementing a version of a “shelter in place” practice for the next two weeks. This kind of measure is being used in California and other places around the world because there is evidence that it slows the spread of the COVID-19 virus and reduces the risk of overwhelming the health care system. **Although we are and will remain an open setting, adherence to these measures is not optional.**

No visitors on campus: This is intended to reduce traffic in and out, and the number of contacts people have with one another. Only essential staff and people making essential deliveries (e.g., food) will come and go from campus. There will be no in-person family meetings, no family or social visitors, and no meetings at Riggs with private outpatients. We have stopped construction at the Inn and suspended all research activities. We have cancelled all lectures, conferences, and other gatherings through April.

Do not travel: This applies to both patients and staff. Staff will come and go from their homes in order to provide clinical care and perform essential operations and are otherwise only to go to essential places like grocery shopping. Patients will be asked not to leave Center grounds (main campus and outer buildings) except for walks or other outside activities done alone or with others if 6-foot social distancing is maintained. We are deciding on a plan to have groceries delivered to the outer programs.

Remote sessions: Many of our individual clinicians are working via video conference (Zoom) or telephone for individual sessions and family meetings.

Video conferencing for meetings: Our program depends on both staff and patients working together in groups. We continue to meet, but to minimize physical contact, we are implementing Zoom video conferencing access to our larger staff meetings, community meetings, case conferences, and other groups. The number of people in any room will be strictly limited and the meetings will be held only in rooms that are well-ventilated and large enough to permit at least 6 feet of distance between each person.

Day Treatment Program (DTP) adaptation: Many of our patients in DTP live in their own apartments and come to campus for individual and milieu services. We are offering DTP patients two options:

- *Aftercare Plus*: Remain in your own apartment and engage in all clinical services remotely (phone or video conference), OR
- *Day Treatment Program at any day level on campus*: Remain in the current program, but live in one of our residential buildings. People who choose this option will be asked not to leave the grounds, as described above.

The Activities Program at the Lavender Door will be available in a limited way for residential patients, with one instructor present weekdays from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. to support students' work while maintaining at least 6 feet of distance at all times. The nursery school has temporarily closed, and the theater production has been postponed. The shop openers program will continue for residential patients.

The COVID-19 Committee meets daily to keep up to date with changing medical and social guidelines and to make plans for protecting the welfare of our patients and staff while continuing to provide excellent care. Many patients and staff have offered valuable input and we are developing processes for more rapid exchange of ideas between the COVID-19 Committee and the rest of the community. Participants in the Committee include:

- Eric Plakun, MD, Medical Director, Chief Executive Officer
- Steven Ackerman, PhD, Accreditation Manager, Staff Psychologist
- Jodi Barbeau, RN, Charge Nurse
- Dave Belliveau, Director of Information Technology
- Daniel Cohen, MD, Medical Consultant, Berkshire Medical Center
- Chauncey Collins, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer
- Bertha Connelley, Director of Human Resources
- Donna Elmendorf, PhD, Director of the Therapeutic Community Program
- Heather Forouhar Graff, MD, Staff Psychiatrist
- Samar Habl, MD, Director of Admissions
- Nicholas Holliday, MD, Director of Psychopharmacology and Medical Services
- Jessica Meagher, Executive Assistant, Office of Medical Director/CEO
- Cathleen Morey, PhD, Director of Clinical Social Work
- Margaret Parish, PhD, Director of Patient Care
- Cheryl Puntill, MN, Chief Nursing Officer
- Nestor Riva, Director of Facilities
- Jane Tillman, PhD, Evelyn Stefansson Nef Director of the Erikson Institute for Education and Research
- John Zollinger, Director of Communications

Preparations for responding to illness: No one in our community has tested positive for COVID-19 at this time. We are making plans to care for any patients who become ill, including asking those with flu-like symptoms to remain in their rooms with doors closed. They will receive support from nursing or other staff as indicated. Staff members who have developed flu-like symptoms have remained home on self-quarantine.

Admissions: Unlike some other comparable institutions, we have suspended new admissions during this period, although admissions staff continue to process referrals for future admission.

Communications: We have established the austenriggs.org/COVID19 webpage as our central communications tool. Updates will be posted regularly on this page. There is also a form to request email and/or text alerts when new updates are made to the page.

Contact Information:

- **Family members:** Your social worker is your primary contact person. If that person is not available, please call the social work administrative assistant, Jessi Meagher, at 413.931.5202.
- **Referring clinicians:** Please call 1.800.517.4447.
- **Media inquiries:** Please call our Communications Office at 413.931.5245.

Again, thank you for your patience, perseverance, and collaboration. We will get through this as individuals and as a community by working together.

Be well,

Eric M. Plakun, MD
Medical Director/CEO