

Spokane Alliance easing stress on hospitals, community with COVID-19 volunteer effort

SPOKANE, Wash.— The most important part of this COVID-19 pandemic has been making sure our local hospitals have enough bed space for anyone who comes in.

Well, **Spokane Alliance**, a non-profit organization, is helping that by assisting people who test positive for COVID-19 before they need emergency care. To top it off, their work is all done over the phone and it is free thanks to funding from the Innovia Foundation and Washington State University.

When a person in Spokane County tests positive, they can opt-in to Spokane Alliance's program.

If they do, they'll be paired with a trained volunteer who calls them every day for about two weeks.

"It's basically just a way to connect people in the community, and work towards alleviating the pressures and stress that covid has brought to our community," Community Organizer Chloe Sciammas said.

They'll make sure the infected person has everything they need while self-isolating, connecting them to food, housing and medical resources with help from county officials.

Many COVID-19 patients who need hospital care are there for oxygen support. That's why each patient in the program gets a "pulse oximeter", which tracks their oxygen levels as if they were in the hospital.

"We can do that for someone at home when we call them everyday, so when someone says 'oh it's 85', then we know they need to get medical care," Clinical Professor Dr. Luis Manriquez said.

The program has already helped more than 75 people in Spokane County.

Some of those people may not have the same access to community and medical resources.

"Minorities have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus, and we're seeing that more recently," Manriquez said. "So, there's a lot of need for support for people whose English is not their first language."

Spokane Alliance is working with the health district and CHAS health to have translators on hand for those people.

On top of that, the program is helping medical students in our community who are serving as volunteers.

"As medical students, you're not quite licensed or equipped to deal with these on the front line, but you feel the need to serve your community and show up," WSU student Ravneet Waraich said. "That's what we're training to do."

The work they're doing even caught Governor Inslee's attention during Thursday's visit to Spokane.

Inslee says he wants to see more of these programs state-wide.

"I'm gonna brag on Spokane across the state of Washington," Inslee said. "This is a community that can really pull together."

