

Fairview Developmental Center opens COVID-19 unit for people with dementia



A special unit for people with dementia who test positive for COVID-19 will open at the Fairview Developmental Center in Costa Mesa on Monday, Dec. 28, 2020.

By **ALICIA ROBINSON** | arobinson@scng.com | The Orange County Register
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A special ward at Costa Mesa's Fairview Developmental Center to care for people with dementia who have COVID-19 was set to begin accepting patients Monday, Dec. 28.

The 50-bed unit is in addition to, and in a separate building from, the up to 180 beds available at Fairview to ease the strain on hospitals dealing with a spike in coronavirus patients.



“The people we’re able to take are not particularly sick,” but they live in a memory care or nursing facility, Alzheimer’s Orange County CEO Jim McAleer said. “The reason we opened the facility is so we can take them out of the hospital.”

The problem has been where to send people in long-term care for dementia when they’re well enough to leave the hospital but are still convalescing, or when they’ve tested positive for COVID-19 and aren’t ill but could be contagious. McAleer said some people with dementia wander, get confused or have trouble wearing a mask, so they could infect others at their facility.

Older people are typically at greater risk of complications or death from the coronavirus, and preventing its spread in nursing homes and assisted living facilities has been a challenge since early in the pandemic.

The 50 beds for dementia patients at Fairview are the result of a collaboration between McAleer’s nonprofit, the Orange County Health Care Agency and the state Department of Developmental Services, which oversees the Fairview campus.

The multi-building campus for decades housed people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, but the last few residents moved out early this year. Part of the campus has been used as one of the state’s auxiliary care sites during the pandemic.

McAleer said he’s been helping set up the dementia unit for the past two weeks, and it will likely bring in about 25 people over the course of the week, taking a handful of patients each day. The facility has alarms at the exits and cameras to ensure no one gets lost, and the staff are trained in dementia care so they can help people eat, shower and stay occupied while they recover.

Various agencies and organizations worked together quickly to get the unit approved and ready, McAleer said, and memory care and nursing home administrators are now being told it’s available.

“Folks are really glad to have some options where they didn’t have them before,” he said.

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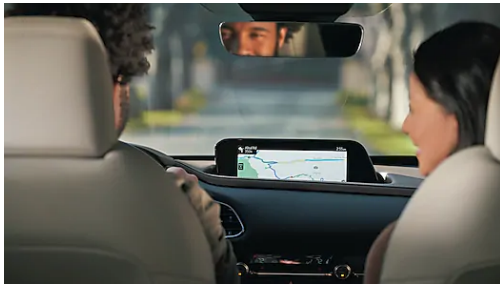
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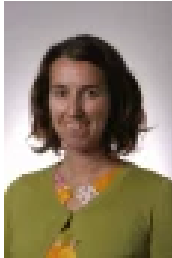
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Alicia Robinson covers cities and local government for the Orange County Register. She has also reported at the Press-Enterprise in Riverside, the Daily Pilot in Costa Mesa, and at small daily and weekly papers in the midwest, before she became an honorary Californian based on hours spent in traffic. Besides government and policy, she's interested in animals both wild and domestic, people who try to make the world better, and how things work.

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