

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

FAUCI TO BE HONORED BY NCRC AS NATIONAL PEACEMAKER

When I say the name "Dr. Anthony Fauci," what persona comes to mind? A kind, plain-spoken public servant and medical professional, or a masked villain intent on controlling everyone and everything?

Fauci wears several hats: physician, scientist, national health leader and more. Currently, he juggles two jobs: director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and chief medical adviser to President Joe Biden.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Fauci has also served as the public face and official voice of the government's war on the virus.

During a long and storied career, Fauci has received many prestigious awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Public Welfare Medal of the National Academy of Sciences, and the National Humanism in Medicine Medal. He's also been given 46 honorary doctoral degrees from colleges and universities in the United States and abroad.

This week, the National Con-

flict Resolution Center (NCRC) will confer a new honor on Fauci: National Peacemaker. We will present the award to him at a virtual ceremony on May 15, as part of our 33rd annual Peacemaker Awards event.

The reasons for selecting Fauci may not be obvious. It's hard to compare the work he does to traditional peacemaking — something akin to the Camp David Accords. That's when President Jimmy Carter brokered a peace treaty between Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat — the first of its kind in the Middle East. In the 45 years since its signing, Israel and Egypt have remained at peace, saving countless lives.

Fauci's brand of peacemaking is different. He has worked in seven administrations, for both Republican and Democratic presidents. Yet he has managed to remain consistently apolitical and stayed above the fray, always acting in the best interests of the American people.

As the pandemic has worn on, Fauci has continued to be steady

fast in his truth-telling, delivering the same mantra, day after day: Wear a mask. Wash your hands. Keep your distance. For many Americans, Fauci's unapologetic admonitions have been a tonic of sorts, in part because he delivers his sermon without fear. It all makes him seem trustworthy — a rare commodity in Washington, D.C.

Still, let's be frank: The self-described "skunk at the picnic" inspires a lot of ire.

Last month, Fauci found himself engaged in a heated exchange with Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio. In a congressional hearing, Jordan asked a question designed to provoke: "What measure, what standard, what objective outcome do we have to reach before Americans get their liberty and freedom back?"

Fauci calmly replied, "I don't look at this as a liberty thing. I look at it as a public health measure to prevent people from dying and going to the hospital."

The expression on Jordan's face — even from behind a mask — suggested that he wasn't satisfied with Fauci's answer. He tried

to bait the good doctor, and failed. Fauci is accustomed to being in the line of fire. In the 1980s, he oversaw the government's response to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

By his own account, it was slow and rigid. Many of the first AIDS patients — gay men and intravenous drug users — suspected the foot dragging was rooted in an ugly prejudice against them.

At the time, Fauci was denounced as a monster and a murderer. But in true peacemaker fashion, he listened to the concerns of the gay community, visiting sick and dying patients at their bedsides.

In an appearance on the podcast "What it Takes," Fauci described the experience as a turning point in his career. It's when he became a "confrontative activist" against his own government.

Whether or not you're a Fauci fan, he can teach us some important life lessons:

- Be humble. Fauci doesn't crave the limelight. At an awards presentation last fall, Fauci didn't talk about his accomplishments. Instead, he thanked the American people for their "profound

courage" during the pandemic. • Practice what you preach. The Washington Post ran a story about Fauci's Christmas Eve 2020: Fauci broke a nearly half-century tradition, staying home with his wife rather than enjoying a traditional Italian meal with family. • Never compromise your integrity. Fauci has said that he doesn't get any pleasure in being the bearer of bad news. But the COVID crisis demands honesty and transparency, even under pressure to be positive. Fauci delivers.

The pandemic tested us in a million different ways. We need to learn from the experience, and emerge as better humans. Doctor's orders.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com NCRC's 33rd annual Peacemaker Awards honoring Dr. Anthony Fauci will be held on Saturday, May 15, at 6:50 p.m. For information, or to register, visit ncrconline.com.

VISITS

FROM B1

"It's been a tough year and a half, I'll tell you," Raymond said.

Skilled nursing facilities were some of the hardest hit areas in the county during the pandemic, with 4,464 novel coronavirus cases among residents and 3,038 staff cases reported between the beginning of the pandemic and May 6, county data shows.

As of Feb. 26, there were 5,911 residents living in skilled nursing facilities throughout the county, the California Department of Public Health reported.

But since vaccination efforts began in December, they've also been some of the earliest sectors of the community to see significant decreases in new cases and outbreaks.

New outbreaks in skilled nursing facilities steadily dropped each week starting in late January and have since stabilized, county data show, as has the rate of new cases among nursing home residents and staff.

As of May 6, there were only 13 active outbreaks in skilled nursing facilities, compared to the high of 63 outbreaks in mid-January.

With the widespread vaccination of skilled nursing residents and staff, as well as the regional decrease in cases allowing San Diego County to move to less restrictive tiers, visitations have been allowed for the majority of residents in nursing homes.

On April 11, CDPH updated its visitation guidance for skilled nursing facilities, but visitors of all vaccination statuses must still be screened for fever and other novel coronavirus symptoms, and wear appropriate personal protective equipment.

Although Valerie cannot visit Raymond in his apartment, they're now both vaccinated and back to visiting each other at least twice a day.

While listening to a live mariachi band under strings of colorful papel picado decorations on Wednesday, Raymond was filled with joy as it was the second time he'd seen his wife that day. "I steal every moment I can get."

"We couldn't sit this close together six months ago, or even two months ago. We enjoy this," he said.

For El Cajon resident Jennifer Potter, the reopening of facilities means not only being able to regularly visit her mother Rita Bumbera at St. Paul's Nursing, she can now also bring her home to visit with the family for a few hours at a time.

Last year, 71-year-old Bumbera

experienced a series of falls and worsening vascular dementia and fibromyalgia while living alone at her apartment in downtown San Diego.

On Christmas, she had a really hard fall while feeding her cat, but she didn't want to be in the hospital during the height of the pandemic. She stayed with her daughter's family for a few days before eventually being admitted to the hospital. Because Potter was born with a congenital heart disease that will someday lead to heart and liver transplants, she was unable to move her mother into her home, so Bumbera was released to St. Paul's in January.

At first, Potter was unable to visit Bumbera at all, and when she eventually could, she was unable to hold her mother's hand.

"The hardest part is that my mom cannot talk, so we would have to write things down," Potter said. "It's not really conversational with my mom. It's more about me telling her what's going on and then her reacting."

With their family vaccinated, they're now enjoying regular visits together at the facility, and Potter can also bring her home to visit with her daughter and husband for about four hours each weekend.

"It was obviously fantastic to physically hold her hand or give her a hug," Potter said through tears. "Me being a sick child, she was just the one who took care of me always, so I just feel like our roles have completely reversed."

With skilled nursing residents and staff largely vaccinated against the lethal virus, and with California's planned reopening date on June 15, what further changes may happen on June 15 are still up in the air, a CDPH spokesperson said in an email.

"Throughout this pandemic, CDPH's primary goal has been focused on ensuring the health and safety of residents at skilled nursing facilities," the spokesperson wrote. "Accordingly, we are looking into any policy updates that may be necessary and applicable at those facilities in relation to the state's planned reopening."

While visitations at skilled nursing facilities have once again been allowed by both the California Department of Public Health and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services, facilities have different policies depending on whether the residents and guests have been vaccinated.

Some facilities allow visitations by appointment for those who are not displaying COVID-19 symptoms, who have neither traveled nor been knowingly exposed to COVID-19 over the past two weeks.



SAM HODGSON U-T

Jen Potter grasps her mother Rita Bumbera's hands at St. Paul's Senior Services Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

This includes La Fuente Post Acute in Vista, which has an online portal leading someone through a series of questions before allowing them to select days and times for potential visits.

There are also facilities that have different visitation criteria geared toward indoor versus outdoor visits. According to its website, Aviara Healthcare Center in Encinitas will allow two visitors at a time for half an hour outdoors, or one visitor a day for a half-hour visit indoors as long as the resident has not been exposed to COVID-19 or has recovered from the virus.

Other facilities, including Arbor Hills Nursing Center in La Mesa, are continuing to rely primarily on outdoor visitations to continue protecting residents.

St. Paul's Senior Services CEO and President Cheryl Wilson said over the past few months, the fear factor of interactions between staff and residents has significantly decreased as all residents and 93 percent of staff across St. Paul's facilities have now been vaccinated.

Vaccinated visitors are allowed to not only come into the facilities, but also to hug and hold hands with their loved ones.

"That has been just an amazing improvement in the quality of life for the people that we serve," Wilson said. "And it's an improvement for our staff, too, because they see the difference in our seniors, how much happier they are."

Although some visits have been able to resume this year, she predicts the June 15 reopening and more widespread vaccination throughout the region will mean even unvaccinated guests will once again be allowed to see their loved ones. To keep residents safe, they

will continue to require that unvaccinated visitors sanitize their hands, wear masks and submit to a COVID-19 screening upon arrival.

Come June 15, St. Paul's may also be able to move away from the state's color-coded system that moves residents into separate units based on whether they have left the facility and potentially interacted with someone who is infected with the virus.

In the current green, yellow and red unit system for nursing homes, facilities must have separate spaces and staff for people who are quarantined. These are used if someone may have interacted with a COVID-positive person during a hospital visit (yellow) or because they tested positive for the virus (red).

This separation is difficult for the staff, Wilson said, and it changes the care residents can receive.

"It's very difficult for rehabilitation to provide the same level of rehabilitation to the yellow and red zones as they do to the green zone," Wilson said.

As a registered nurse, Wilson said infection control has always been pretty tight at the St. Paul's facilities. In the past, St. Paul's staff who hadn't received flu vaccinations were required to wear masks at work, which will likely continue going forward when it comes to anyone who isn't vaccinated against COVID-19.

There are also some changes the facility has made over the past year that will continue indefinitely as extra precautions, such as using air purifiers and UV light sanitizing devices in addition to wiping down surfaces with sanitizing wipes.

Changes have also been made in

local memory care facilities where older adults diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia live.

At Stellar Care in the College Area, Executive Director Linda Cho said the facility now allows in-person visits and has expanded the activities they offer in-house. Residents can also have more dining options and can leave the facility to visit loved ones without quarantining upon their return, unless they encountered someone with COVID-19.

Looking ahead to June 15, Cho said in an email that the state's reopening will allow more normalcy within the facility.

"Currently, we must still observe social distancing in our community, which is hard for residents," Cho said. "Our residents desire closer contact with their friends in the building whether it be sitting closer or perhaps holding hands."

"Even though all the residents are fully vaccinated, because we are a long-term care community, our state licensing guidelines require that residents still maintain social distancing as much as possible."

Although many California nursing homes have resumed visitations, California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform advocate Michael Connors said others still continue to restrict visitors.

With the majority of residents and staff vaccinated, Connors said restrictions on socialization and visits should already be scaled back.

"We have concerns of course that there should be more of a return to normalcy already in nursing homes for residents than is occurring," Connors said. "Our sense is that a lot of nursing homes in California are paying little to no attention to the orders from both California and from the federal government to allow visitations in facilities."

Loneliness caused by a lack of activities and visits can cause severe impacts on the physical and mental health of older adults, including nursing home residents.

Given the dangers of isolation, Connors said facilities should face consequences if they continue denying residents access to visitors.

"It's outrageous that so many people living in nursing homes are still being separated from their loved ones," he said. "Many nursing home residents remain completely isolated from their loved one because California and the federal government are not enforcing their directives to allow visitors."

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FINES

FROM B1

lances, with its sprawling suburban neighborhoods, meandering canyons and traffic congestion, but city officials say excessively long response times are still unacceptable.

The main motivation for the switch from Falck to AMR was the prospect of a boost in quality, especially response times in diverse and low-income neighborhoods south of Route 94. But the new penalty for excessively long responses applies in all neighborhoods.

The new contract, which the City Council approved last month after more than a year of analysis, also requires Falck to quickly determine what caused any excessively slow response, explain it to city officials and propose a solution.

"We also added a little more teeth to the language in what we call the 'plan to cure,'" said Stowell, explaining that Falck must provide a written improvement plan within 15 days. "We got a little more defined in what is actually required."

The contract with Falck also requires the company to be significantly more transparent regarding expenses,

revenues and staffing than AMR was, he said.

"Our nose is going to be in their business," the chief said. "We have a vested interest in their sustainability and their success, so we are asking for a lot more documentation."

Unlike the city's deal with AMR, the new contract requires frequent and detailed reports from Falck on such things as staff turnover, hours worked, vehicle mileages, billing collection rates, patient charges, cash flow and related information.

Stowell and Falck officials say this type of oversight will allow city officials to see potential problems before they materialize and possibly make constructive suggestions to make service better and more efficient.

AMR officials, who lobbied aggressively to retain the city contract, declined to comment.

The new five-year contract requires Falck to provide 1,008 hours of daily ambulance service. That's a 20 percent increase from the 840 hours now provided by AMR, which had proposed a more modest increase to 888 hours in its effort to keep the contract.

While the City Council unanimously approved the switch to Falck, Council-

woman Marni von Wilpert expressed skepticism that the contract is written well enough for the city to have leverage over Falck for non-compliance.

Stowell agreed this week that Falck's commitment to provide 1,008 hours could be relatively difficult to enforce.

"There is not a dollar figure associated with that, so that will be left to interpretation," he said. "But that is another enforceable area where we can call them out, for either a breach of contract or plan to cure, and impose penalties."

Stowell said he is confident Falck will be a great partner because the reputation of the company, which wants to become the dominant ambulance provider in California, is on the line.

Some other critics say the new contract should increase penalties for failing to meet aggregate response-time goals, which require ambulances to arrive within 12 minutes to at least 90 percent of the emergencies across the city and within 12 minutes to at least 90 percent of emergencies in each of the four geographic quadrants of the city.

The penalties remain a warning for a first offense, \$30,000 fine for a second offense, \$60,000 for a third of-

fense, \$120,000 for a fourth and \$250,000 for a fifth.

Stowell said city officials considered increasing those fines but decided against it.

"There's a balance there, because these are partners of ours in public safety," he said. "Although we want these to be enforceable and something that motivates them to continue staffing so they can respond in a timely manner, we also don't want to bankrupt them or cause problems for us because they're not financially stable."

Others have suggested San Diego return to a response-time model that divides the city into eight zones instead of four, which reduced the chances some neighborhoods would get neglected. The larger the compliance zones, the easier it is for an ambulance company to achieve response-time goals by making up for poor times in some neighborhoods with great times elsewhere in the zone.

San Diego experimented with eight smaller zones for a few years but then reverted to four larger zones in 2017 after complaints from AMR.

"It was very hard for an ambulance company to have a deployment model that covered those small areas," Stowell said. "Gaps would start popping up all over the

city."

Stowell added that including eight zones in the request for proposals the city issued last year would have elicited proposals much less financially favorable to the city.

"We saw the headaches that the eight zones would bring, and we knew that the price to bid that would be astronomical," he said. "With the traffic congestion our city sees, it would be very hard to keep that up. It just was not a sustainable model."

Fewer excessively long emergency response times would also improve fire service in San Diego, because a fire engine and an ambulance respond to most emergencies. "Those are my folks sitting there at the scene of a traffic accident or with a medical patient awaiting an ambulance, so the quicker that ambulance gets there, my fire engine can go back to providing other services," Stowell said.

The city is now in the middle of a six-month transition from AMR to Falck that is scheduled to conclude on Thanksgiving weekend. Stowell said some growing pains are probably inevitable, but that he expects things to be running smoothly by next spring.

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TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Sunday, May 9, the 129th day of 2021. There are 236 days left in the year. This is Mother's Day.

Today's highlight

On May 9, 1994, South Africa's newly elected parliament chose Nelson Mandela to be the country's first Black president.

On this date

In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson, acting on a joint congressional resolution, signed a proclamation designating the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day.

In 1962, scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology succeeded in reflecting a laser beam off the surface of the moon.

Today's birthdays

Actor and politician Glenda Jackson is 85. Actor Candice Bergen is 75. Singer Clint Holmes is 75. Singer Billy Joel is 72. Actor John Corbett is 60. Actor Rosario Dawson is 42.

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