



November 18, 2020

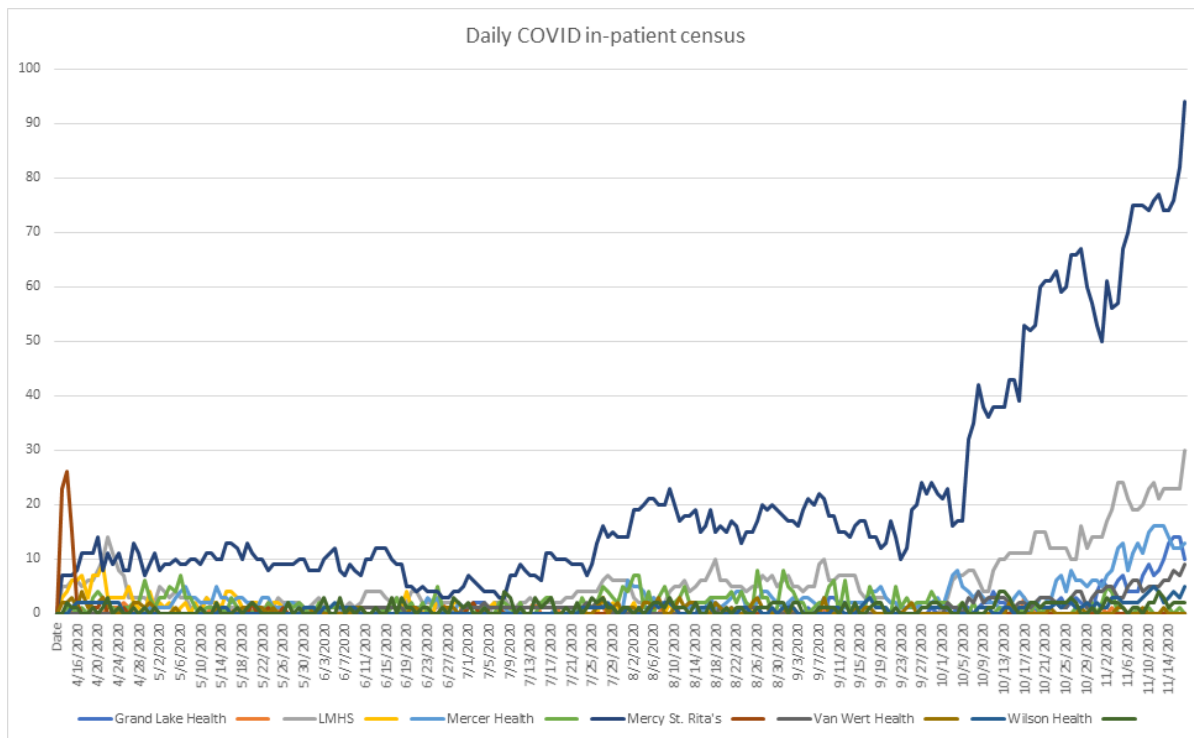
Dear Members of the House State and Local Governments Committee:

On behalf of Bon Secours Mercy Health, a community-based system of 21 hospitals in Ohio, I am writing to share my experience as the President of Mercy Health Lima. For those familiar with the region, you may know us better as the name of our Medical Center, St. Rita's.

While we are located in Lima, we serve about 500,000 residents in West Central Ohio. Our primary market comprises Allen, Auglaize and Putnam counties, but we also serve as a regional referral center for several more contiguous counties. We take this role quite seriously and we consider it a privilege to extend our care to so many. This is a responsibility we have long embraced—and today is no different as we find ourselves in the midst of a once in a century pandemic.

When COVID-19 was first making its mark in the United States, and in Ohio, my colleagues and all our associates worked around the clock to ensure our Medical Center was prepared for whatever might come our way. And while we were certainly not without personal tragedies, early interventions to curb the spread spared our region widespread impact. As summer began and residents became more comfortable in their routines, we began to see increases in cases and hospitalizations—but all manageable from a healthcare capacity perspective.

However, at the beginning of October, the plight of many other cities around the state and country suddenly hit very close to home. Our community commitment to the things we know work—avoiding large gatherings, sanitizing, face coverings—relaxed and many reverted to their previous, comfortable routines. At this time, we began to see rather startling increases in our COVID hospitalizations. Today, as I write this letter, we have **94 COVID patients on seven COVID units.**



I probably don't need to tell you that we didn't have an extra seven units sitting idle, and we certainly didn't have extra staff to manage an additional seven units. We have stepped up to the challenge and are making it work as best we can, because that is our Mission, and this is what our community needs from us. We have redeployed team members from our out-patient offices to work in the hospital; we have hired traveling nurses from all around the country to help fill shifts; and our doctors are stretching themselves and their colleagues further than they thought possible. But this pace is not sustainable, and our capacity is not unlimited.

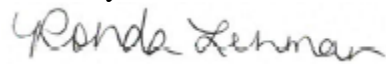
My team of incredibly talented and dedicated people are concerned. They are concerned about our ability to provide the care that every individual deserves when they come to us—whether that is for COVID, or a stroke, or a heart attack, or an accident. And they are not just thinking about what's happening today. My team understands completely that our cases could dramatically increase after Thanksgiving and that will push us to the brink.

I am not one to often offer advice on legislative matters. I focus on the service we provide to our communities. However, my colleagues and I concur that Senate Bill 311 could dramatically impact my ability to provide the care our friends and neighbors deserve. Public health officials need every tool available to them to limit the spread, so that my team can focus on those who most need our resources.

I assure you, this public health crisis is not over—in fact we are in the most critical time now. There will be a time to assess and debate our world, national and state response to COVID-19, but I do not believe that time is now.

For these reasons, I believe we must remain committed to the process and ensure that we can be nimble in our response to this once in a lifetime public health crisis.

Sincerely,



Ronda Lehman
President
Mercy Health – Lima

CC: Brian Smith, Chief Operating Officer, Bon Secours Mercy Health
Don Kline, Group President, Bon Secours Mercy Health
Jon Fishpaw, Chief Government Relations Officer, Bon Secours Mercy Health

