

# Crisis Management Experts Meet Demand During a Pandemic

Fastaff Applies 30 Years of Experience in Rapid Response®  
Travel Nurse Staffing to Help Battle the Coronavirus



# Situation Overview

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Fastaff is the pioneer and industry leader in Rapid Response® travel nurse staffing. From natural disasters to census spikes to contagions and pandemics, Fastaff proves to be the reliable partner for healthcare systems nationwide in urgent and crucial situations.

As experts in crisis management, Fastaff and U.S. Nursing enacted a series of operational maneuvers to ensure reliable delivery to clients fighting the coronavirus outbreak, amidst an out-of-control contagion, an avalanche of unknown facts, a crashing economy, and a 100% virtual work environment.

In their own words, Fastaff leaders describe how they mobilized to meet unprecedented demand for skilled healthcare professionals.

# Q and A with Kathy Kohnke

Fastaff Senior Vice President, Client Services



## **Q. How did you help hospitals prepare for the coronavirus?**

A. At first, we held webinars and shared white papers on emergency preparedness. Our goal was to help our clients think through every possible challenge, which is something we do routinely in our line of work. Since nobody knew how widespread this would be, we tried to identify any system that might cause a backlog and find an efficiency, from time-keeping entry to orientation. We wanted to eliminate any barrier to a speedy delivery.

Nothing is ever as planned out as you want it to be, but we have experience working in uncertain situations. So we reached out to clients directly to find out how they planned to prepare for the situation, knowing their units may become filled to capacity. We asked how they were going to handle their COVID patients, and found that everybody did it a little bit differently. One hospital decided to move all COVID-19 patients to one facility.

Others tried to figure out how to separate COVID patients, so they weren't co-mingling with other patients. We asked for their plan and then we tried to recognize potential problems and recommend solutions.

Clients also wanted us to know what we were seeing in other parts of the country. As circumstances changed quickly, they wanted to learn from other's experiences. Many appreciated our industry-leading flexibility as they were planning for many unknowns.

## **Q. What do you think was the biggest challenge hospitals and healthcare systems had to overcome when the virus hit?**

A. The biggest challenge in the beginning was the limited amount of PPE available, given the size of the pandemic. Nurses also faced a fast learning curve in terms of taking care of patients, because their symptoms presented differently from what they've seen in patients who had coronaviruses

before. Everyone was guessing. There was a shocking mortality rate. These hospitals and nurses were working so hard to take care of patients the best way possible and they were still losing patients. They thought they could treat this like other coronaviruses, but those approaches weren't working. They had people coding (*losing vital signs and requiring immediate resuscitative efforts*) every night, which is exhausting and heartbreaking for the healthcare workers. The care was tough. For some patients, the nurses were often the last person to hold their hand and say goodbye, and that was very taxing. It was just so contagious and widespread.



**Q. How were you able to scale your operations to meet demand?**

A. We had three times more nurses on assignment than we normally do in March and April, so we had to make sure our operations could adequately support that level of deployment. We cross-trained staff to perform other functions. It was all hands on deck. We hired and trained 41 temporary workers to provide additional support. Individual states also worked with us on licensure procedures to help get nurses into the field faster.

**Q. What are some things hospitals should be thinking about during re-openings?**

A. There are five ways that hospitals and surgery centers can prepare for the expected escalation of elective and non-emergency procedures.

1. They need to consider how they communicate to the public. It's important to convey that the facility is a safe environment to receive care. That might involve a PR campaign or rebranding.
2. Emergency Preparedness is crucial. If cases spike again this fall as predicted, it will be key to have a plan for separating infected patients and increasing communications if the number of COVID patients begins to increase. In addition, a surge would also require increased screening of employees and a contingency plan if staff have to quarantine.
3. It may seem like a minor point, but figuring out how patients, employees, visitors, etc. will enter and leave the facility is also very important. If you are limiting capacity inside the facility, you'll need to determine how to space entrants and create no-passing zones.

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4. New admission protocols will have to be established. That might include increased screening of patients in-person as well as pre-screening on the phone or through online checklists. Requiring pre-surgery COVID tests, day of surgery temperature checks and assessments also make sense, as does prohibiting guests from gathering in waiting rooms.

5. Enhanced sanitizing procedures have become vitally important. That not only includes increased cleaning, but ensuring that supplies of PPE, linens, swabs, etc. are well stocked. Hospitals also need to pace patients with enough time in between to properly sanitize their rooms. In addition, ventilation and air filtration systems should be checked to confirm that they work properly and have the capacity to support isolation areas.

*With more than 17 years of experience as a former buyer of hospital contract labor, **Kathy Kohnke** understands the importance of having a comprehensive emergency management plan ready to activate. Kohnke currently builds staffing strategies for hospital clients nationwide as Fastaff’s senior vice president of client services. She’s ready to be your trusted partner in contingency planning.*

**Fastaff**  
Travel Nursing

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