

AMAZING PEOPLE DOING AMAZING THINGS

Exeter Hospital's Switchboard Operators & Dispatchers – Working On The Front Line From Behind The Scenes

Exeter Hospital's Communications/Switchboard staff might be out of sight from patients and employees, but for many of our patients they are the FIRST line of communication with our organization. That has never been more apparent than over the past two months, during the coronavirus pandemic. Prior to March, there were days when the operators and dispatchers handled up to 1000 calls a day. As the national public health crisis began, there were days when that call volume nearly doubled.

"The first three weeks were extremely hectic, as life was forever changing and there was so much anxiety and confusion," says **Cristy Tucker**, Department Supervisor. "Many callers were frustrated or upset because they were trying to reach a doctor or a patient, attempting to get information, or had questions and wanted immediate answers." Cristy feels fortunate many of her team members have been with the department for several years, so are used to functioning during emergency situations.

"This dedicated team has really stepped up to do whatever it takes and handle whatever is needed during these trying times," Cristy says. "They are all highly skilled at listening, expressing empathy, and researching information to provide callers with answers in a quick and efficient manner, all while staying calm and upholding the highest level of customer service standards."

To add an additional challenge, the departments' communications system was upgraded in February, and the staff were still learning the new technology when the crisis hit. "On top of the added number of calls and trying to master the new system, we also had to troubleshoot issues with phone lines being unavailable due to meetings being held via phone rather than in person in response to social distancing requirements," Cristy says. But with the help of Information Services, particularly **Ken Kuster**, Principal Telecomm Analyst, those issues were resolved in short order. "Ken was such a huge help," she says.

One of the newer dispatchers, **Sue Eno**, had just joined the department when the organization went into an emergency status. "Poor Sue, to be learning a new job just as the turmoil began wasn't fair. But as is true to her nature, she jumped right in and figured things out very quickly - all with a smile on her face," Cristy says. Sue says the experience has certainly been interesting. "Luckily, my colleagues are awesome and incredibly patient," she says. "And Cristy was wonderful – telling me just to focus on one thing at a time, which was excellent advice." Sue is grateful to have joined this team and the organization. "I feel like, in my own small way, I am helping people. It makes me feel good knowing I can point them in the right direction."

One of our more seasoned dispatchers, **Patti McHenry**, feels the same way. "There is so much uncertainty in people's lives right now. It is important for us to be able to provide them with accurate information and straight forward answers so we can assist in helping them remain calm." Patti says through it all she has tried to be extra upbeat and comforting to everyone she speaks with. "For all I know I could be the only person they have talked to in days, so I listen to their fears, ensure they have the correct information, and try to brighten their day," she says. "It's my way of helping. It's just a little thing, but I guess it's the little things that make a big difference these days."



Clockwise from left, some of the Hospital's Communication/Switchboard team members: **Andrea Baillargeon, Cheryl Jackson, Linda Leblanc, Kathy Clark.** Not pictured: **Phyllis DeYoung, Maggie Doane, Sue Eno, Donna Estabrook, Maryann Falcone, Karen LaChapelle, Leslie Levins, Patty McHenry, Linda Terrio, Suzanne Tobin, Cristy Tucker** (Department Supervisor), and **Lori Ward.**