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NEWS RELEASE

Hotline Provides Answers, Screening for COVID-19 *Joint effort between Mercy Fort Smith, Baptist Health begins Thursday*

FORT SMITH, Ark. (March 19, 2020) – A hotline is now available for River Valley residents who are concerned about COVID-19.

The number to call is (479) 289-6508. The hotline will be staffed from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday-Friday and will allow callers to ask questions about COVID-19 and be screened by trained clinical staff who will determine whether the caller should be sent to a testing site staffed by health care workers from Mercy Fort Smith and Baptist Health.

Callers will be walked through a questionnaire to help determine whether they should be tested and be given further instructions about how to be tested if they are advised to do so. Only those who fall in the “high risk” category will be advised to be tested.

River Valley residents are encouraged to use the hotline to reduce their exposure to the general public. Health care professionals will be able to clinically assess symptoms over the phone and direct callers to the appropriate next steps and have the ability to schedule a COVID test when appropriate. Callers do not have to be a patient at either hospital to use the hotline.

“This will be a great service to anyone with concerns about COVID-19,” said Amy Fore, Mercy Fort Smith Clinic chief operating officer. “We are happy to collaborate with the city of Fort Smith, Sebastian County and Baptist Health to bring this hotline to the community.”

Stephanie Whitaker, vice president of patient care and chief nursing officer at Baptist Health, said “Baptist Health is not a business, it is a healing ministry.”

“By collaborating with elected officials, Mercy hospital and other organizations in the River Valley during this challenging time, we can be the hands and feet of Jesus.”