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March 27, 2020

The MMS will continue to monitor developments related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and the response by state and federal agencies. For current information, including updates from the NEJM, visit the dedicated page on the MMS website: massmed.org/covid-19.

If you have questions, we will bring them to the appropriate stakeholder for an answer. Please send questions to the [MMS Department of Health Policy and Public Health](#).

Follow our COVID-19 activities on:
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Public Health

MMS and Mass. DPH call summary

On Thursday, March 26, the MMS held a second COVID-19 conference call for physicians with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH). Commissioner Monica Bharel, Dr. Larry Madoff, Medical Director of the DPH Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences; Dr. Catherine Brown, State Epidemiologist, and Kerin Milesky, Director of DPH's Office of Preparedness and Emergency Management joined more than 700 MMS members for the one-hour discussion. [Click here](#) for a summary and transcript of the question-and-answer portion of the call.

Sustaining yourself during the crisis

On Tuesday, March 31, Thrive Global and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health will host a virtual town hall for all first responders who seek guidance on self-care as we all work to care for others during the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information and to register, [click here](#).

Practice Management

Coding and billing updates from PPRC

In our continuing effort to bring you the latest on coding and billing for COVID and NON-COVID related services, we are pleased to share the following:

1. The recently released “CPT reporting COVID Testing” decision tree developed by the American Medical Association. [Click here](#).
 2. A quick reference guide on Massachusetts payers Telehealth Coding. [Click here](#).
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CMS, FDA and White House Coronavirus Task Force will hold call tomorrow

CMS Administrator Seema Verma, FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn, MD, and the White House Coronavirus Task Force invite physicians to the next call in the new series for physicians: **Lessons from The Front Lines: COVID-19**. The call will take place on **Saturday, March 28 from 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM EST**, and the topic of discussion is: **COVID-19 Therapeutics**. You are invited to join the call to share your ideas, strategies, and insights with one another.

Please see dial-in details below. Conference lines are limited, so you are highly encouraged to join via audio webcast, either on your computer or smartphone web browser.

Participant Dial-In: 877-251-0301

Conference ID: 9409959

Audio Webcast: [click here](#).

Telehealth billing guidance

As you are aware, on March 17, 2020, CMS announced that Fee-for-Service (FFS) Medicare is expanding coverage for telehealth services, with an effective date of March 6, 2020. Previously covered telehealth services are now available to beneficiaries in their home environments, regardless of geographic location. National Government Services (NGS) is glad to offer assistance to a group of providers as they start billing for telehealth services. For support, please contact Kathy Dunphy at Katherine.dunphy@anthem.com.

Government Guidance

Important updates from Governor Baker

Online triage assistance/Telehealth: In Governor Baker's press conference today, he instructed all travelers entering Massachusetts to self-quarantine for 14 days. He also announced a partnership with Buoy Health to implement an online assistance tool that can help triage patients who are feeling sick by collecting information about their symptoms and referring them to the appropriate medical resources. This online tool is meant to preserve maximal personal distancing, especially between patients and health care providers. Governor Baker reiterated his desire for people to utilize the telehealth resources made available to them, including the Buoy Health app. He repeatedly stressed, however, that the online tool is not a substitute for medical care.

Expanding prescribing authority: Secretary Sudders announced a public health order granting expanded prescribing authority to APRNs. She also thanked the MMS for serving as a matchmaker between medical volunteers and locations that could use their services.

Medical students graduating early: The Governor further discussed efforts to reduce administrative burden to providing quality care in this demanding time. To help expand the physician workforce to accommodate the increased need for medical services within the Commonwealth, the Governor announced that BORIM has authorized certain medical students nearing graduation to apply for an emergency 90-day limited license. These medical students are those entering a residency, fellowship, or internship in Massachusetts, and this license will be available for them immediately so that they may begin their programs early and supplement the current physician workforce in ways that comport with their current capabilities relative to their experience, education, and training. This action aligns with news from other states and medical schools that are working toward getting medical students into the workforce expeditiously by graduating students early and providing provisional licenses. We will continue to monitor developments around the country regarding potential early graduation and approval of provisional limited licenses.

\$2 Trillion Federal Stimulus Package and Impact on Healthcare Providers

Congress passed a \$2 trillion federal stimulus package, including \$100 billion in direct financial support to hospitals, physician practices, and other health care providers. This support is for costs of treating COVID-19 patients and to ease the financial impact on those who lose revenue as a result of the pandemic. The bill also creates a new loan product within the Small Business Administration for loans of up to \$10 million to help cover payroll and overhead costs, with expanded loan forgiveness criteria —physician practices with not more than 500 employees may qualify. Additionally, the legislation suspends the 2% Medicare sequester in May through December 2020, grants authority for the Secretary of HHS to waive telehealth coverage requirements for new patients during a national emergency, and allows for enhanced use of telehealth under Medicare for federally-qualified health centers, among other provisions. MMS will continue processing the details of the physician-centric provisions and offer additional details in future updates.

A call for action: Letter sent to Gov. Baker, Sec. Sudders, legislative leaders

The Medical Society is continually receiving inquiries from members expressing a range of concerns relative to the COVID-19 public health emergency and we are focused on supporting physicians in the Commonwealth in this time of need. To address these pressing issues, the Medical Society has [sent a letter](#), signed on by 16 specialty medical societies, including the Massachusetts College of Emergency Physicians, to Governor Baker, Secretary Sudders, Speaker DeLeo, and Senate President Spilka.

The letter outlines three primary areas of concern for physicians and health care professionals - PPE shortages, financial support for physician practices under great strain, and crisis standards of care and liability during this public health emergency. The letter makes corresponding requests for action on both the legislative and regulatory level to address these issues. These challenges, if addressed quickly, can help physicians overcome supply shortages, financial challenges, and provide peace of mind in providing essential care to patients during this crisis.

This letter supplements the daily communication over the past two weeks between the Medical Society and state and federal government raising key issues and advocating for solutions to the challenges posed by the current crisis.

Your Medical Society In the News

MMS President Dr. Bombaugh talks COVID-19, discusses challenges in pandemic response

Earlier this week, Massachusetts Medical Society president Dr. Maryanne C. Bombaugh joined WBZ radio's Dan Rea for two segments around COVID-19. You can listen to a podcast of the interview by [clicking here](#).

Additionally, Dr. Bombaugh represented the Medical Society in a [Boston Globe article](#) focused on pregnancy and COVID-19.

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