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April 15, 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.

As a reminder, physicians may continue to email questions to the MMS for assistance. For information on developments related to the COVID-19 response and resources available from the state and federal agencies, send questions to dph@mms.org. For assistance with practice management and sustainability, telemedicine, and payer relations, send questions to pprc@mms.org.

Educational Resources

AG Healey announces new website for health care workers, first responders

On Wednesday, April 15, Attorney General Maura Healey launched a new website to provide (1) health care workers and first responders in Massachusetts with key resources and (2) the public with information about how they can help.

The website – FrontlineMA.org – is an initiative spearheaded by the AG's Office, in collaboration with HubSpot and IDEO, in response to the urgent need for centralized information for frontline workers, including personal protective equipment (PPE),

prioritized testing, safe housing, meals, self-care, and emergency child care. It also invites the public to help by offering messages of support, buying meals for frontline workers, helping to provide a safe place for workers to stay between shifts, and ways to donate PPE.

“For the physicians and students who comprise the Massachusetts Medical Society, the partnership of Attorney General Healey and her office since the onset of the COVID-19 public health emergency has been invaluable,” Massachusetts Medical Society president Dr. Maryanne C. Bombaugh said. “While our health care workforce and first responders have fearlessly and selflessly answered the call to care for our critically ill patients, they are tired – physically, mentally, and emotionally. A convenient, trusted one-stop portal that allows our frontline workers to connect with resources and support that can help mitigate some of the personal and professional burden they are encountering because of the pandemic is incredibly important and welcomed.”

Practice Management

New clarifications on emergency funds

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provided more information regarding the \$30B Emergency Fund [announced](#) on Friday to Medicare-enrolled providers.

[The CARES Act Provider Relief Fund](#) will provide relief to both providers in areas heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and those providers who are struggling to keep their doors open due to healthy patients delaying care and cancelled elective services.

If you ceased operation because of the COVID-19 pandemic, you are still eligible to receive funds so long as you provided diagnoses, testing, or care for individuals with possible or actual cases of COVID-19. Care does not have to be specific to treating COVID-19.

HHS broadly views every patient as a possible case of COVID-19. HHS partnered with UnitedHealth Group (UHG) to deliver the initial distribution to providers. Physicians who believe they should have received funds but did not can contact UHG's Provider Relations at (866) 569-3522 or visit [UHC](#).

Main Street Lending Program

Title IV of the CARES Act includes a subtitle called "Coronavirus Economic Stabilization Act (CESA)," which created the Main Street Lending Program and authorizes the Secretary of the Treasury (working with the Federal Reserve) to make loans, loan guarantees, other investments and subsidies to provide liquidity for mid-size businesses (up to 10,000 employees) for losses incurred because of coronavirus. This funding will assist households and employers and support the ability of state and local governments to deliver critical services during the coronavirus pandemic. To learn more, [click here](#).

Telehealth: Distant site practitioners

Many members of our Medical Society have asked for clarification regarding distant site practitioners who furnish Medicare telehealth services from their home.

CMS provided the following information: There are no payment restrictions on distant site practitioners furnishing Medicare telehealth services from their home during the public health emergency. The practitioner should report the place of service (POS) code that would have been reported had the service been furnished in-person (for example, POS 11 for office). This will allow our systems to make appropriate payment for services furnished via Medicare telehealth which, if not for the PHE for the COVID-19 pandemic, would have been furnished in-person, at the same rate they would have been paid if the services were furnished in-person.

CMS: COVID-19 stakeholder engagement call on Thursday

You are invited to CMS “Office Hours” on COVID-19, which will take place on Thursday, April 16, from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. EST. The "Office Hours" series allows hospitals, health systems, and providers to ask questions of agency officials regarding CMS’s temporary actions that empower local hospitals and health care systems to:

- Increase hospital capacity – "CMS Hospitals Without Walls"
- Rapidly expand the health care workforce;
- Put patients over paperwork
- Further promote telehealth in Medicare

Dial-in details are below. Conference lines are limited, so we highly encourage you to join via audio webcast, either on your computer or smartphone web browser. You are welcome to share this invitation with your colleagues and membership.

- Toll-free attendee dial-in: 833-614-0820
- Event plus passcode: 6168487
- For webcast link, [click here](#).

CMS increases Medicare payment for high-production coronavirus lab tests

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) on April 15 announced Medicare will nearly double payment for certain lab tests that use high-throughput technologies to rapidly diagnose large numbers of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases. This is another action the Trump Administration is taking to rapidly expand COVID-19 testing, particularly for those with Medicare, including nursing home residents who are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19 and most affected by COVID-19 outbreaks across the country.

Medicare will pay the higher payment of \$100 for COVID-19 clinical diagnostic lab tests making use of high-throughput technologies developed by the private sector that allow

for increased testing capacity, faster results, and more effective means of combating the spread of the virus. High-throughput lab tests can process more than 200 specimens a day using highly sophisticated equipment that requires specially trained technicians and more time-intensive processes to assure quality. Medicare will pay laboratories for the tests at \$100 effective April 14, 2020, through the duration of the COVID-19 national emergency. To read the complete announcement, [click here](#).

Government Guidelines

Medical community letter advocating for federal legislative priorities

The Massachusetts Medical Society, the American Medical Association, and organizations representing hundreds of thousands of health care providers [sent a letter to congressional leadership](#) on April 15. The letter outlines many of the medical community's top priorities for the next federal COVID-19 relief package, urging them to include these priorities in the legislation. Some of the top concerns outlined include:

- Improving repayment terms for Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payments;
- Increasing Medicaid and TRICARE payment rates, a request for a positive payment update to the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule, and extending sequestration relief;
- Additional direct financial support to physicians via emergency grants; · Additional funding for and expanding of (to include certain practices with over 500 employees) the Small Business Loan programs;
- Requiring ERISA plans to cover telehealth and telephone services;
- Support for residents/students through tuition assistance or loan forgiveness of \$20K and training flexibility;
- Liability protection for physicians and other clinicians (and the facilities in which they practice) providing medical services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

MMS Government Relations will continue to lobby the Massachusetts congressional delegation on the importance of including these provisions in forthcoming federal relief legislation.

Physician Wellness

AMA on 5 ways organizations can effectively address physician anxiety

With a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is common for physicians and other health professionals to experience increased levels of distress and anxiety, especially when social isolation is felt. As physicians and other frontline health professionals strive to find balance, it is important to identify the sources of anxiety. To read tips from the AMA, [click here](#).

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