



Emergency Physicians: Protecting our Communities against COVID-19

COVID-19 has drastically changed the way emergency medical care is being delivered in this country. While some communities in “hotspot” areas are facing a surge of patients, emergency departments in other regions of the nation are actually seeing patient volume losses of up to 50 percent. With these challenges in mind, we urge Congress to address these priorities to protect patients and support our health care safety net.

Protecting Patients

We need to protect patients from the financial impact COVID-19 has on our health care system.

- Congress should mandate that health plans cover all COVID-19 care, including testing *and* treatment, without patient cost-sharing and with appropriate reimbursement to the clinicians for all services rendered.

Equipping Frontline Healthcare Professionals

Emergency physicians and other frontline health care workers are risking their lives each day as they care for their patients in the emergency department without sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE), leaving many with only one N95 mask per week.

- We need to employ a proactive, coordinated federal effort that includes use of the Defense Production Act and restocking of the Strategic National Stockpile to ensure PPE moves through production and to the bedside where it is urgently needed.

The dearth of available protective gear has left some to bring their own or use donated PPE, but even this is prohibited in some hospitals.

- While we await additional equipment, we must protect and strongly enforce our health care heroes’ rights to wear and use PPE, even if they supply it themselves.

Ensuring Adequate Support

Without immediate and dedicated federal resources and support, fewer emergency physicians will be left to care for patients in our community—a shortfall further exacerbated as they try to make preparations for future COVID-19 surges.

Given the lack of necessary resources—such as personnel, supplies, equipment, hospital beds, and medications—emergency physicians have been forced to make extraordinary treatment choices.

- Congress should extend broad civil immunity to physicians and other clinicians for any alleged injury or death while they are providing medical care in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Emergency physicians also face unexpected costs for providing care right now such as temporary housing to isolate away from our families to keep them safe, child care costs due to school or daycare closures, or costs incurred when we become ill or test positive and are unable to work, among others.

- Congress should establish a “hazard pay” supplemental fund to acknowledge these risks and support emergency physicians and others on the front lines of this pandemic.