

AMA President: We're channeling your collective voices into action

APR 10, 2020

Sara Berg, MS

Senior News Writer

The medical community has reached a critical stage in the fight against COVID-19. With cases and deaths continuing to climb across the country, physicians, nurses and other health professionals remain on the front lines of COVID-19 care.

"You have stood tall, you have risen to this moment and you have shown this nation who we should be listening to: Physicians, public health experts and scientists," said AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, during the AMA's National Physician Townhall. "Time and again, you have answered the call despite breakdowns in leadership, despite conflicting messages and despite severe shortages of resources and lifesaving equipment."

"The coronavirus pandemic presents a challenge our country has not faced on this scale for generations. But let me be clear, you are not shouldering it alone," she said. "The AMA has been fighting on your side from the beginning, channeling your collective voices into action."

With a virtual crowd of 4,000 in attendance, the AMA National Physician Townhall covered important areas the Association continues to work on in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Access to PPE

"We've been your powerful ally at the White House, at the negotiating table and everywhere that important decisions are being made to get you what you need to fight this pandemic, especially PPE testing kits and ventilators," said Dr. Harris. "I've met personally with president Trump and his task force to pressure them to alleviate these shortages and to invoke the full powers of the defense production act to accelerate production and resolve supply chain issues and the AMA will continue to apply pressure until this happens."

“The AMA also heard from the front lines that physicians were being disciplined, punished even most of the physicians being fired for raising the issue of inadequate PPE,” she said. “We said at the time, and we continue to say, that certainly we know that institutions need to have media policies to coordinate media responses, but no one should be disciplined in any manner for raising an issue that was already well known to the public.”

“HHS [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services] and CMS [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services] are looking for ideas and looking for best practices for preservation and reuse of PPE,” said Todd Askew, senior vice president of advocacy at the AMA. “It is far from ideal, but it's unfortunately where we find ourselves right now and we will continue to press the federal government to use every lever they have to increase both acquisition and production of PPE.”

Clinical clarity on treatment

“There's tremendous tension over the use of unapproved therapies. I can't emphasize enough the remarkable support I have for Dr. Harris' comments publicly. She's been relentless in commenting about the need for science and evidence and evidence and science,” said Howard Bauchner, MD, editor-in-chief of scientific publications at JAMA, which has received 2,000 manuscripts related to COVID-19 and published 60 papers that have resulted in 15 million views.

It is important to understand the limits of successful treatments because “even a vaccine does not represent a cure and we have to be incredibly careful about how we talk about this publicly,” he said, adding that “a successful treatment will reduce mortality by 25% perhaps 30%, but it will not cure the disease. I want to be careful that we don't mislead the public.”

“Without the appropriate element, we're reaching for straws and there's been an enormous amount of selective reporting of successful drugs and they keep coming across my desk every day,” said Dr. Bauchner. “To the extent possible, decisions have to be based on science and evidence. In addition, we're doing a disservice to people who will get infected in the future if we can't resolve some of those issues today.”

After the townhall, Dr. Bauchner discussed further lessons learned from COVID-19 during a Q&A interview with Todd Unger, the AMA's chief experience officer.

Financial stability

“We have been your powerful ally with Congress fighting to protect your practices from the financial impact of this pandemic,” said Dr. Harris. “The AMA fought for billions in loans and direct financial

support for physician practices and ensured that it was part of the CARES Act passed by Congress earlier this month and this includes \$100 billion which is often portrayed as a hospital only fund.”

However, the CARES Act actually “does include support for physicians to cover cost of treating COVID-19 patients and recoup losses that practices have sustained,” she said. Learn more about how to get help under the CARES Act.

“The \$100 billion dollar emergency fund, they’re in the process of deciding how it will be distributed, but it will be available for practices not only for the cost of caring for COVID-19 patients but for lost revenues that will be suffered because of a sharp decline in office visits and obviously the necessity to cancel so many elective procedures that we’ll be rolling out very soon,” said Askew. “It should be broadly available to most physicians and there are efforts already underway to increase that fund even more, recognizing that it’s not enough.”

“There is a real emphasis at HHS at CMS to get that money out and into people’s hands, so practices can be sustained because health care needs obviously aren’t going away,” he said, adding that the SBA loans “are very favorable in certain circumstances and are available to practices with less than 500 employees working through their current lender or other lender that work with the small business administration.”

“For the most part, a large portion of it will be forgivable,” said Askew. “It acts almost just like a grant to the practice for the purposes of maintaining payroll and benefits and other overhead costs.”

Learn what the \$2 trillion coronavirus relief plan means for doctors and find out more about available loans and other financial assistance for physician practices.

We need to hear from you

“We’ve arrived at an all hands-on deck moment in the fight against COVID-19. We need everyone and every resource available to turn the tide,” said Dr. Harris. “The AMA is leveraging the power of your voice at the highest levels so that you can focus on the job at hand, taking care of your patients and saving lives.”

“We are your ally in this battle and we’re fighting for your safety, your peace of mind and your livelihood, so it’s critical that we continue to hear from you. We want to hear what frustrates you and what concerns you,” she added. “We want to hear about the obstacles you’re facing and how we can help remove them. We want to know how we can better support you and all that is on your shoulders.”

Stay up to speed on the?AMA’s COVID-19 advocacy efforts?and track the fast-moving pandemic with the?AMA’s COVID-19 resource center, which offers a library of the most up-to-date resources from?



JAMA Network™, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Health Organization.

The AMA also created a physician's guide to COVID-19, which features resources on how to optimize the supply of PPE.

Meanwhile, JAMA has put out a call for ideas on how to conserve the supply of PPE that already has generated hundreds of responses. The AMA Code of Medical Ethics offers foundational guidance for health care professionals and institutions responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learn more about how the AMA is supporting physicians on the front lines of COVID-19.