

# How pandemic's painful spring will inform prep for fall surge

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As leaders at one of Michigan's largest health systems brace for the anticipated double whammy of COVID-19 and influenza season this fall and winter, their experiences early in the pandemic have helped them understand there's more to preparing for another surge than making sure the supply closet is stocked.

The most important thing? Communication.

More specifically, it is making sure leadership provides consistent messaging regarding people's security and safety, said Betty Chu, MD, MBA, the senior vice president and chief quality officer for Henry Ford Health System in Detroit. She is leading the health system's response in Michigan to the pandemic.

Dr. Chu, who also serves on the AMA Council on Medical Service, shared her organization's experiences and lessons learned during an online discussion hosted by AMA Chief Experience Officer Todd Unger. The AMA is providing COVID-19 video updates featuring interviews with a wide range of physicians and experts from the AMA and elsewhere who provide real-time insight on the challenge of the pandemic.

"You can't communicate enough, and ... when you do communicate, you have to be incredibly consistent with the messaging that you communicate so that people feel that we've got their backs on a regular basis," said Dr. Chu, an AMA member.

Beyond the internal communication, it's also important for physicians to provide the community a clear, consistent message.

"It's become clear during this pandemic that having a trusted source of information that you can get your information from that's science-based and reliable is incredibly important," Dr. Chu said. "There are lots of opportunities if you look around you, you contact your local agencies, you start getting

involved in your local communities. People are looking for advocacy from physicians.”

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.

## Providing employee support

Dr. Chu said that for staff, things like child care, transportation and a place to stay are important things for leadership to consider when preparing for a fall wave of COVID-19 and flu.

Henry Ford Health System partnered with area hotels to help their physicians and staff find somewhere to stay temporarily. They also helped support employees who had a spouse lose a job by giving out nearly \$1 million to employees to help keep them going.

“We’ve been really fortunate that we’ve had a lot of support from the community and we have been able to provide philanthropic support through our organization, providing relief for rent, relief for car payments, relief for payments for child care, for many, many of our employees,” Dr. Chu said. “We don’t want them to worry about their economic hardship while asking them to come to work and also help service our patient population.”

And support needs to continue once a surge has let up, Dr. Chu said, noting that they have provided behavioral health support for their employees.

“We recognize, like during any crisis, people are really running at 100 miles an hour, and then when they stop running, they realize, ‘Wow, emotionally, I’m not doing so well,’” she said. “If you’re not thinking about it now, because you’re in the height of the crisis, starting to plan and prepare for the effects of the crisis on your people and how you’re going to need to support that, is going to be critically important.”

## Ramping up supplies, staff

Being ready for another spike in cases still involves making sure your organization has the supplies necessary to treat patients and to protect patients, something that has become a little more

predictable based on everyone's experiences the past six months.

Dr. Chu said it's also important to look at staffing and to use staffing models to ensure there are enough environmental service workers, ICU nurses and physicians in the emergency departments.

"Knowing what those critical job categories are and what worked and continue to be as we go into the fall, and doing some of that planning has been really important for us, as well, as we plan for what's likely going to be another surge in the fall," she said.