

Physicians shouldn't face repercussions for speaking out on PPE

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The need for physician, nurses and other health care workers on the front lines to have access to personal protective equipment (PPE) during a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic has been much publicized. Yet as COVID-19 first ravaged the country during the spring, a short supply of PPE had adverse health effects.

At some facilities, physicians, nurses and other health professionals were not allowed to supply their own PPE. At others, those who spoke to the inadequate supply of PPE were threatened with a cut in hours or termination.

Physicians' rights to bring their own PPE and object to adverse work conditions—and the need for them to be able to do so without repercussions—were highlighted in two resolutions presented at the November 2020 AMA Special Meeting.

The AMA House of Delegates adopted new policy calling for the AMA to:

- Affirm that the medical staff of each health care institution should be integrally involved in disaster planning, strategy and tactical management of ongoing crises.
- Support evidence-based standards and national guidelines for PPE use, reuse, and appropriate cleaning or decontamination during surge conditions.

Delegates also directed the AMA to:

- Advocate that it is the responsibility of health care facilities to provide sufficient PPE for all employees and staff in the event of a pandemic, natural disaster, or other surge in patient volume or PPE need.
- Support physicians and health professionals in being permitted to use their professional judgment and augment institution-provided PPE with additional, appropriately decontaminated, personally-provided PPE without penalty.
- Support a physician's right to participate in public commentary addressing the adequacy of

clinical resources or health and environmental safety conditions necessary to provide appropriate and safe care of patients and physicians during a pandemic or natural disaster. Work with the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response to gain an understanding of the PPE supply chain and ensure the adequacy of the Strategic National Stockpile for public health emergencies.