Why the federal transition in pandemic response must start now

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As the pace of COVID-19 infection intensifies across the nation, shattering records and stretching our health system to the limits, we have reached a crisis point that demands a strong, effective and unified response. That is why our AMA has joined with the American Hospital Association and the American Nurses Association to urge President Donald Trump and his entire Administration to begin working immediately with the transition team assembled by President-Elect Joe Biden to share the information and resources required to confront the pandemic, reduce the spread of this deadly virus, and save countless lives.

The peril we face cannot be overstated. The COVID-19 case count has grown exponentially since autumn arrived, to the point that our country reported 1 million new cases in the space of just six days this month. The accelerated rate of hospitalizations has pushed resources to the breaking point in multiple states and strained the physical and mental strength of physicians, nurses and other health care workers beyond anything we’ve yet seen.

Throughout our country’s history, collaboration and cooperation have been the defining traits in the peaceful transfer of power—and at this juncture, their importance has never been greater. Sharing real-time data and updated factual information on every aspect of the public health response to COVID-19 between administrations is essential to successfully responding to this crisis.

Now that vaccine trials have shown promising results, plans for their dissemination and administration must be shared immediately so that no time is lost in their future deployment. A seamless transition at the highest level of the federal government also requires fully sharing information on the assets assembled for Operation Warp Speed, as well as the status of the personal protective equipment, ventilators and other elements of the National Strategic Stockpile.

Physicians, nurses and other providers of care have firsthand, frontline experience with the suffering and death inflicted by COVID-19, both in the patients we treat and within our own ranks. It is from this
humanistic perspective that we advocate immediate action to share the resources and information needed to defeat this deadly foe. We must not allow our response to be compromised by politics or any other influence that lies outside of evidence-based science.

Lives are at stake. The greatest public health crisis in our lifetime demands a unified response, one that transcends politics for the health and well-being of our nation and all of its people. The health care community will continue to do everything within our power to prevail over this pandemic; we ask that those in a position to help us do so recognize their responsibility to advance this mission, not impede it.