

Coalition for Physician Accountability

Safeguard the Public, Protect our Health Care Workforce during the COVID-19 Pandemic

April 9, 2020

The member organizations of the Coalition for Physician Accountability have released the following statement in support of strengthened efforts that must be in place to safeguard the public, and to protect our nation's health care workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic so they remain able to meet the public's needs.

The Coalition's members include the national organizations responsible for the accreditation, assessment, licensure and certification of physicians throughout their medical career, from medical school through practice. Our membership also includes members of the public and the profession. We share a strong commitment to protect the public's health and safety through the delivery of quality health care.

COVID-19 cases have now surpassed 400,000 and deaths have exceeded 12,000, an alarming development that has affected patients, families, and communities across the country. We all depend on physicians and other healthcare workers to provide safe and compassionate care. Hundreds of thousands of physicians at every level of training and experience (medical students, residents, and practicing physicians, including retired and inactive physicians volunteering to reenter the workforce) have partnered with countless nurses, respiratory therapists and other health care workers to care for patients. It is critical during this national emergency that the public be provided with the best care possible by qualified health care workers who are themselves adequately protected.

Physicians have an ethical duty and obligation to care for others despite personal risk. Institutional and elected leaders must not take advantage of that obligation. Without safeguards such as proper personal protective equipment (PPE) and adequate testing, they are putting the health of their patients, as well as their own health and that of their families, at risk. The Coalition recognizes that supplies of PPE at this time are inadequate and supports continued studies to examine the safety of reuse and sterilization of PPE as options.

Health care workers are professionally bound to identify inadequate resources that impact their ability to safely treat patients or keep themselves safe. They must not suffer retribution or retaliation for calling attention to unsafe systemic conditions for patients or caregivers. Conditions for physicians and health care workers on the frontlines of direct patient care must be safe.

It is vital in these uncertain times that our elected leaders and officials be guided by science and evidence-based principles when making decisions on behalf of the entire population to combat the virus causing COVID-19. The American public and the health care workers who care for them in this time of great need are making enormous sacrifices to do their part in stopping the spread of the virus. It is essential that our leaders provide them with resources they need and guidance that is factual and transparent.

The member organizations of the Coalition are committed to work with governmental agencies and health care delivery systems to safeguard the public, protect our frontline health care workers, and provide our elected leaders with the information they need to support sound, evidence-based decision-making.