COVID-19 Practice Viability Survey of Texas Physicians May 2020

Research Findings
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Introduction
Texas physicians were asked several questions to gauge COVID-19’s financial impact on practices of all sizes, types, and specialties. This was the third in a series of TMA COVID-19 impact surveys. The survey was deployed on May 4, 2020. Reminders to take the survey were sent on May 7th and 10th. The survey was closed on May 11, 2020. A total of 36,995 Texas physicians were invited to participate in the survey and 1,548 responses were received.

Physicians were asked to answer all questions based on their primary type of practice. Physicians that self-identified their primary type of practice as resident or teaching, administration, or research (3%) saw question one only. Additionally, for the purposes of this survey, the COVID-19 pandemic was defined as starting March 1, 2020.

Primary Type of Practice (Question 1)
Nearly half (43%) of responding physicians reported that they are solo practicing physicians and 45% reported that they are part of a group practice.

Questions 3 through 13 were analyzed by primary form of practice and the relationships either were not statistically significant or did not meet the criteria for a Chi square test.
Physicians who self-identified as being part of a group practice were asked to quantify the size of their practices. Sixty-four percent of responding physicians reported being in a group of 8 doctors or fewer. The median size of respondents’ practices is five physicians.
Including solo physicians, more than three-fourths of respondents (87%) were in practices comprised of 8 physicians or fewer.
Impact of COVID-19 on Physicians and Their Practices (Question 3-12)

As mentioned above, only a subset (97%) of physicians saw the following questions. Please note that not all questions were seen by the entire subset due survey design.

Impact on physicians (Question 3)
A strong majority of respondents reported that since the start of the pandemic their work hours (68%) and salary have been reduced (62%).

![How COVID-19 has affected physicians (Check all that apply.)](image-url)
Question three was analyzed by age, geographic grouping, specialty membership. Only relationships found to be statistically significant are reported in this document.

While over 50% of physicians in all geographic groupings experienced a salary reduction, the percentage of physicians in Travis county were affected the most (75%).
By specialty, the greatest percentage of physicians who reported having their work hours (78%) reduced are OB/Gyns. The same is true among those who reported having their salary reduced (77%). Even though primary care physicians were the least affected, a majority of these specialists were also affected by reduced work hours (62%) or reduced salary (57%).
CODVID-19 Impact on Patient Volume (Question 4)

Physicians were asked how the pandemic has affected their patient volume. Sixty-six percent of respondents reported that their patient volume had decreased by half or more.

How COVID-19 has affected patient volume

- Decreased 76-100%: 26%
- Decreased 51-75%: 40%
- Decreased 26-50%: 25%
- Decreased 0-25%: 7%
- Unchanged: 1%
- Increased: 1%
- I don't know: 1%

Question 4 was analyzed by geographic grouping and found not to be statistically significant. The question also was analyzed by specialty and membership, and the relationships were found not meet criteria for a chi square test.
COVID-19 Impact on Practice Revenue (Question 5)
Physicians were asked how the pandemic has affected their practice revenue. Sixty-three percent of respondents reported that their revenue had decreased 51 to 100%.

The question was analyzed by geographic grouping and found not to be statistically significant. The question also was analyzed by specialty and membership, and the relationships were found not meet criteria for a chi square test.
Consequences of Cash Flow Concerns (Question 6)
The majority of responding Texas physicians reported that due to cash flow concerns they applied for a small business administrative (SBA) loan (64%) and/or reduced physician compensation or benefits (63%). Fewer than a fifth (16%) of respondents said that they received an accelerated or advanced payment.

Question six was analyzed by geographic location and specialty. Only relationships found to be statistically significant are reported in this document.
Physicians in Travis county were the most likely to report they reduced their compensation or benefits due to cash flow concerns (76%). In comparison, Bexar county saw the fewest physicians to report this. Still, more than half of Bexar county physicians (56%) reported experiencing a reduction in compensation or benefits.
Seventy-two percent of pediatricians reported they applied for a Small Business Administration (SBA) loan to address cash flow. Only 38% of indirect patient access/care specialists reported doing the same. However, 68% of them reported that they reduced their own compensation or benefits to control costs. OB/Gyn specialists were most affected by a decision to reduce compensation or benefits. As expected, the specialties least likely to receive an accelerated/advanced payment are pediatrics and OB/Gyn at 9% each. This is because most physicians that accepted these payments accepted them from Medicare. The pediatric and OB/Gyn specialties are the least likely to receive Medicare payments.
Request for Accelerated of Advanced Payment (Question 7)
Only those respondents who said they received an advance or accelerated payment (16%) were asked about their success among various payers. Few of those who responded reported being successful with any of the listed commercial payers. However, 89% of physicians who requested advance or accelerated payment from Medicare were successful.

The question was analyzed by geographic grouping and specialty and found not to be statistically significant.
Laying Off or Furloughing Staff (Question 8)
Just under a third of respondents (30%) reported that their practice had laid off or furloughed staff as a way to address cash flow concerns. Of those respondents, 33% reported that their practice had laid off or furloughed more than half of their staff.

The question was analyzed by geographic grouping and found not to be statistically significant. The question was also analyzed by specialty and found not to meet the criteria for a chi square test.
Applying for an SBA Loan (Question 9-11)

Of the 64% percent of physicians who reported applying for an SBA loan as a way to address cash flow issues, 95% said they applied for the Paycheck Protection Program.

The question was analyzed by geographic grouping and membership and found not to be statistically significant. The question also was analyzed by specialty, and only the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) relationship was found to have statistically significant differences.
Thirty-two percent of surgical specialists and pediatricians reported applying for an EIDL while only 14% of nonsurgical specialists did the same.
Physicians who reported applying for an SBA loan were asked about their experience. Forty-four of physicians found the process to be difficult, but they were able to apply.

The question was analyzed by geographic grouping and specialty and found not to meet the criteria for a chi square test.
Physicians who reported applying for an SBA loan were asked about the outcome of their application. Almost three quarters of responding physicians reported that the bank accepted and approved their SBA loan applications.

This question was analyzed by geographic grouping and found not to be statistically significant. This question was also analyzed by specialty and found to not to meet criteria for the chi square test.
Telemedicine Payment Parity (Question 12)
Physicians were asked if they are being paid for telemedicine visits (for the approved codes) at the same rate as in-person visits according to the various COVID-19 emergency waivers. Thirty-nine percent of physicians reported that they received payment parity all or some of the time for TDI-regulated commercial payers. This is followed by Medicare with 31% of physicians reporting they received payment parity for all or some of the time. However, physicians were more likely to select “I don’t know” when asked about payment parity for any type of payer. This may be due to the fact multiple changes have been made by various payors. Often these changes are not with the same effective dates.

![Percentage of physicians paid for telemedicine visits at the same rate as in person visits](chart)

- **Medicare**: 18% All the time, 13% Some of the time, 6% None of the time, 22% I do not bill telemedicine, 41% I don't know.
- **TDI regulated commercial payors**: 13% All the time, 26% Some of the time, 6% None of the time, 17% I do not bill telemedicine, 39% I don't know.
- **Medicare Advantage**: 11% All the time, 14% Some of the time, 6% None of the time, 23% I do not bill telemedicine, 46% I don't know.
- **Medicaid**: 8% All the time, 9% Some of the time, 8% None of the time, 28% I do not bill telemedicine, 47% I don't know.
- **ERISA plans (employer sponsored)**: 6% All the time, 19% Some of the time, 7% None of the time, 18% I do not bill telemedicine, 51% I don't know.
Beneficial TMA Resources (Question 13)

Physicians were asked which resources and services offered by TMA would most benefit their practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eighty-five percent of respondents reported payer and payment advocacy as most or somewhat beneficial.
Discussion

The survey findings provide a cross-sectional snapshot of the financial impact that COVID-19 has had on Texas physicians and their practices. These data will support the association’s strategic planning.

Since the start of the pandemic more than half (66%) of responding physicians reported their patient volume had decreased by more than 51%. Strong consideration should be given to the likelihood that many of these practices will not be able to recover and reach full capacity by the end of the year. This presents an opportunity for TMA to increase its support for physicians through advocacy for payment parity, COVID-19 testing availability, and guidance for telehealth billing and coding and for financial assistance options and operating expenses as these areas were identified as most or somewhat beneficial by survey respondents.

Regarding financial assistance, the most common program accessed by physicians to address cash flow concerns was the Paycheck Protection Program. However, that program is just one of many options. TMA can further study this area and provide guidance on how to navigate the various programs that are often complex.

Survey Methodology

The survey contained a total of 14 questions. Not all questions were answered by all respondents due to the survey’s design and skip patterns. Physicians who identified their primary type of practice as resident or teaching, administration, or research at the beginning of the survey were not presented with additional questions. The survey included a mix of closed-ended response items and Likert scale. Many of the questions were structured for multiple choice or nominal scale responses.

Texas physicians and residents with email addresses in the TMA database were emailed a personalized link to the survey with an invitation to participate. No published links allowed uninvited responses. Each link was unique and carried with it respondent demographic information. Each respondent was allowed to respond only once to the survey. The survey was closed approximately a week after it was initially deployed.

Data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Open-ended responses were assigned to categories for analysis. In analysis, respondents are segregated by demographic variables and compared with the whole population. Results at the 90% confidence level are reported.
Demographics

Gender

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<th></th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
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Age

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<td>41 to 50</td>
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<tr>
<td>51 to 60</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 and older</td>
<td>32</td>
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</table>

Specialty

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<th>Specialty</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonsurgical Specialty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pediatrics</td>
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<td>Indirect Access</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surgical Specialty</td>
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<td>Obstetrics/Gynecology</td>
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Geographic Grouping

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Geographic Grouping</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<td>Dallas</td>
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<td>Harris</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bexar</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travis</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarrant</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
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TMA Membership Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Status</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member</td>
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<td>Former Member</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonmember</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix-Survey Instrument

Please answer the following questions in accordance with your primary place of practice. Note: For the purposes of this survey, the COVID-19 pandemic is defined as starting March 1, 2020.

Q1 Which of the following best describes your primary form of medical practice?

- Group practice owner, co-owner, shareholder, or partnership
- Group practice employee
- Hospital employee
- Solo
- Resident
- Teaching, administration, or research
- Other (please specify): ________________________________

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Display This Question:

If Which of the following best describes your primary form of medical practice? = Group practice owner, co-owner, shareholder, or partnership

Or Which of the following best describes your primary form of medical practice? = Group practice employee

Q2 How many physicians are in your group or partnership?

________________________________________________________________
Q3 In which of the following ways has the COVID-19 pandemic affected you? (Check all that apply.)

- Work hours reduced
- Been furloughed
- Been laid off
- Salary reduced
- No impact

Q4 During the COVID-19 pandemic, has your practice experienced any change in patient volume? Note: For the purposes of this survey, the COVID-19 pandemic is defined as starting March 1, 2020.

- Decreased 0-25%
- Decreased 26-50%
- Decreased 51-75%
- Decreased 76-100%
- Increased
- Unchanged
- I don't know.
Q5 During the COVID-19 pandemic, has your practice experienced any change in **revenue**? Note: For the purposes of this survey, the COVID-19 pandemic is defined as starting March 1, 2020.

- Decreased 0-25%
- Decreased 26-50%
- Decreased 51-75%
- Decreased 76-100%
- Increased
- Unchanged
- I don't know.
Q6 Have cash flow concerns caused your practice to take any of the following actions. (Check all that apply.)

- [ ] Draw from personal funds
- [ ] Apply for a Small Business Administrative (SBA) loan
- [ ] Close or sell practice
- [ ] Lay off or furlough staff
- [ ] Reduce physician compensation or benefits
- [ ] Accept Health and Human Services stimulus funds
- [ ] Receive an accelerated/advanced payment
- [ ] Apply for other types of financial assistance (e.g., line of credit, grant, loan deferment)

Display This Question:
If Have cash flow concerns caused your practice to take any of the following actions. (Check all that... = Receive an accelerated/advanced payment
Q7 If you requested an accelerated or advanced payment from a payer, were you successful?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Payer</th>
<th>Successful</th>
<th>Not successful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas</td>
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<td>![ ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Health Care</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigna</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humana</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aetna</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Display This Question:

"If Have cash flow concerns caused your practice to take any of the following actions. (Check all that apply) = Lay off or furlough staff"

Q8 If your practice laid off or furloughed staff, what percentage of staff were laid off or furloughed?

- 0-25%
- 26-50%
- 51-75%
- 76-100%

Display This Question:

"If Have cash flow concerns caused your practice to take any of the following actions. (Check all that apply) = Apply for a Small Business Administrative (SBA) loan"
Q9 If you have applied for an SBA loan, which one? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Paycheck Protection Program
☐ Economic Injury Disaster Loan
☐ SBA bridge loan
☐ Economic Injury Disaster Loan Advance ($1,000/employee, maximum $10,000)
☐ I don’t know.

Q10 Please indicate your experience with seeking an SBA loan.

☐ The process was easy.
☐ My lender was not participating, lacked SBA guidance, or not ready.
☐ I had difficulties with my lender (e.g., too difficult to apply, lender not responsive).
☐ The process was difficult, but I was able to apply.
☐ I don’t know.
Q11 If you applied for an SBA loan, what was the outcome?

- The bank accepted my application and it is pending.
- The bank was not accepting any more applications.
- The bank refused to accept my application because I don't have an established relationship.
- The bank accepted my application and it was approved.
- The bank accepted my application, but it was denied.
- I don't know.

Q12 Are you being paid for telemedicine visits (for the approved codes) at the same rate as an in-person visit according to the various COVID-19 emergency waivers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>Some of the time</th>
<th>None of the time</th>
<th>I do not bill for telemedicine</th>
<th>I don't know.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TDI-regulated commercial payers</td>
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<td>ERISA plans (employer sponsored)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q13 Which of the following resources and services offered by TMA would most benefit your practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource and Service</th>
<th>Least beneficial</th>
<th>Somewhat unbeneificial</th>
<th>Somewhat beneficial</th>
<th>Most beneficial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Telehealth billing and coding guidance</td>
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<td>Payer and payment parity advocacy</td>
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<td>Human Resources assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial assistance options and operating expense guidance</td>
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<td>Tips for practice operations</td>
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<td>Clinical care protocols</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physician and staff health and wellness support</td>
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</table>

Q14 Would you be willing to speak with TMA staff about your answers?

○ Yes

○ No

End of Block: Default Question Block