



Physicians Caring for Texans

March 23, 2020

Dear Governor Abbott:

On behalf of the 53,000-plus physician and medical student members of the Texas Medical Association, thank you very much for your leadership in making sure the people of our great state remain as safe and healthy as possible as we confront the coronavirus pandemic. We truly appreciate the steps that you; Health Commissioner John Hellerstedt, MD; and Texas Medical Board President Sherif Zaafran, MD, have taken to date; they have been tremendously helpful.

As we watch the course of events in the other nations and states whose infection trajectories precede Texas, one thing has become very clear. The current shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) in Texas is unacceptable. Physicians and our staff cannot safely test, examine, or treat our patients without protective masks, gowns, gloves, and other equipment. Our doctors, nurses, lab technicians, and other health care professionals on the front lines of this fight are inadequately equipped to keep themselves and our fellow Texans safe.

Without sufficient equipment, health care workers will be exposed to and infected by the virus. This is more than a personally tragic consequence for these professionals who are dedicated to performing their duties despite the dangers. We absolutely cannot lose any of our health care workforce to infection in a time of record demand.

For our part, physicians and hospitals are taking steps consistent with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to decrease consumption of PPE. We know this will not be sufficient to meet the need, and some health care professionals rightly suspect whether these steps are indeed safe for them and their patients.

We strongly support the executive orders you issued Sunday regarding procurement and capacity, and praise your appointment of John Zerwas, MD, to lead that effort. But more must be done, and quickly.

Therefore, TMA is calling on you and the State of Texas to procure PPE from all nonhealth care-related industry stockpiles by any means necessary. (We are tremendously grateful for those industries that already have begun to donate their supplies.) At a time when physicians are being asked to stop elective surgeries, we understand how devastating this crisis is to our businesses, but the current lack of PPE requires, in our opinion, such drastic measures in other industries. This equipment must be distributed equitably among our hospitals, doctors' offices, labs, nursing homes, home health agencies, and others at risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus.

We also urge you to continue making expeditious requests for PPE supplies from the Strategic National Stockpile for expedited delivery through the Trauma Regional Advisory Councils (RACS) not just to hospitals but also to physicians' clinics and offices. No previous distribution from RACs has reached these frontline offices. This additional focus is critical to keep patients from further flooding emergency departments.

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Finally, we ask that you consider using emergency funds to finance a massive media campaign to educate all Texans about what they can do to minimize demand for PPE. These steps include not only the individual hygiene and social distancing recommendations your office already is disseminating but also tips on when to seek care, steps for self-isolation, and other efforts to prevent community spread of the virus.

The physicians of Texas are proud to join you in the fight against this new and deadly disease. Please do not hesitate to let me know what we can do to help you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David C. Fleeger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David C. Fleeger, MD
President
Texas Medical Association