

July 1, 2020

LaQuandra Nesbitt, MD
Director, DC Health
899 North Capitol Street NE
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Dr. Nesbitt –

On behalf of the physician community in the District, thank you for providing science-based, factual guidance in helping the District navigate the COVID-19 epidemic.

As the declared public health emergency in the District approaches its expiration date, we urge you to consider making permanent emergency rules issued during the public health emergency. While COVID-19 cases are decreasing, the healthcare community has seen that many emergency provisions improve care regardless of the presence of an epidemic. In addition, until a widespread vaccination program is in effect, the presence of the novel coronavirus constantly threatens to spread, as we are now seeing in other states. Removing these provisions could hinder our ability to mitigate a new community spread.

In particular, we urge you to make permanent or modify the following emergency regulations:

- **Allow telemedicine to remain a treatment tool available to residents.** Physicians should be permitted to treat and seek reimbursement for telemedicine appointments with patients regardless of point of service if appropriate standards of care are met. Telemedicine has proven to be an effective way to screen patients for illness without potentially infecting staff. It is especially effective for patients with limited mobility, lack of access to transportation, or a schedule that does not easily permit in-person visits.
- **Permit existing relationships between patients and providers to continue across District state lines.** Mobility of the local population is high, and residents moving into the District from Maryland or Virginia should be permitted to continue seeing their licensed physician via telemedicine if the provider is appropriately licensed in that jurisdiction.
- **Support the expansion of audio only telemedicine.** While we understand audio-only telemedicine is regulated by District law, we ask the Department to not oppose amendments or changes to the audio-only portion of the 2013 Telemedicine Act.

As other states have shown, vigilance must be maintained to ensure the District does not regress in its COVID-19 case count. We ask that even if the official public health emergency continues, you enact regulations that can improve medicine in the District, protect patients (especially the most vulnerable), and help us make the District the best place to practice medicine.

Sincerely,



J. Desiree Pineda, MD, FACP
President, Medical Society of DC