

Recommended Proposals to Deal with Ongoing COVID-19 Public Health Crisis

From the first suspected case of COVID-19 in the District, physicians have been on the frontline of protecting our residents. Physicians have also seen and talked with colleagues in other states with major COVID-19 outbreaks and know what faces the District if we do not act now to protect the healthcare workforce and our patients.

MSDC is publishing this COVID-19 guidance to provide decision-makers with the information needed to make tough but essential choices to keep our entire population safe and healthcare system functioning. Each item below will identify a problem, solution, and MSDC resources available to assist. The solutions are aimed at DC Health, the Bowser Administration, and the District Council. This guidance is based on two physician virtual townhalls on COVID-19, outreach from the MSDC website, and conversations with physicians across the District.

Protecting healthcare staff from infection

Issue: As the frontline defense against the spread of COVID-19, personal protective equipment and rules for protecting healthcare workers from infections are essential. We are seeing in some parts of the U.S. the impact that a reduced healthcare workforce is having on preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Solutions

- Healthcare workers must be considered a priority class for COVID-19 testing.
- DC Health should issue interim guidance based upon the CDC's guidance on protecting physician practices from infection. The guidance should include criteria for what types of patients should be seen in-person, what is an adequate staffing level for operations, and when it is permissible for a practice to temporarily close.
- The District government should allocate more protective equipment for all physician practices that are encountering suspected COVID-19 cases.
- The District Insurance Commissioner should immediately promulgate rules waiving all cost-sharing for COVID-19 treatments, waiving prior authorizations for COVID-19 treatments, and encouraging telemedicine by mandating an equal payment to providers as if the treatment were in-person

MSDC Assistance:

- MSDC leaders in various practice types can serve as a physician advisory committee to help shape interim guidance on best practice management
- MSDC can offer a best practices template for telemedicine
- MSDC is creating a wellness offering to provide physicians with support for burnout, stress, or emotional issues related to the public health crisis.

Streamlining testing procedures to more quickly treat all patients

Issue: The lack of protective equipment and disjointed testing procedures is unnecessarily exposing physicians and their teams to COVID-19 and endangering the healthcare workforce.

Solutions:

- Implement, as soon as possible, drive-through swabbing and testing centers.
- Re-appropriate underutilized buildings or former healthcare facilities as COVID-19 test centers.
- Recruit retired or non-practicing health care workers through a variety of incentives to staff testing facilities in order to not tax the health workforce in the District.

MSDC Assistance

MSDC, founded in 1817, is the first medical society chartered by an Act of Congress.

- MSDC can work with DC Health to identify retired or life MSDC members who could serve in an expanded capacity without endangering their health
- MSDC, working with its members, can help identify sites for testing centers

Financial viability for medical offices

Issues: Like many small businesses, physician offices are struggling with maintain a healthy workforce, adjusting to patients cancelling or avoiding appointments, and paying for the infrastructure to keep offices operating.

Solutions:

- Ensure that any small business relief can apply to physician offices and its employees
- Allow DISB to explore permitting malpractice regulations to shield physician offices that act in good faith on treatment in response to COVID-19.

MSDC Assistance

- MSDC can work with the District government to provide messaging to small physician practices on how to keep their practice open during the public health crisis.
- MSDC can provide template language for temporary malpractice standard adjustments in light of the public health emergency.