

Friday, March 20, 2020

The Honorable J. Kevin Stitt
Governor, State of Oklahoma
Oklahoma State Capitol
2300 N Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105
Phone: (405) 521-2342

RE: COVID-19 Call to the Public and Measures to Support Healthcare Workers

Dear Governor Stitt:

On behalf of the state's healthcare workers and facilities, thank you for the swift action of declaring a statewide emergency in the light of COVID-19. The State's actions to support healthcare workers and protect the public are much appreciated. As you know, Oklahoma's healthcare workers are in every community in the state and on the front lines of caring for patients. As the COVID-19 situation unfolds, we urge you and the State of Oklahoma to call on individuals to stay home.

Call on individuals in the general public to stay home. Avoid gatherings of any size through social distancing and stay home except for necessities. Such a call is prudent to achieve maximum mitigation of the spread of COVID-19, to ensure our health system capacity is not strained beyond its limits. We are aware of multiple health clinics and health systems already facing critical supply shortages. Dramatically slowing the spread now will ensure our health system can care for those who get COVID-19 or have other healthcare needs.

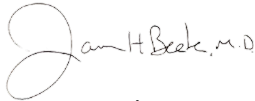
We urge the State to take the following additional measures to combat the crisis:

- **Issue clear and concise guidance for clinics facing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shortages and increase the speed at which requests for PPE can be fulfilled.** As community spread has increased, some facilities around the state have already stopped testing or limited testing to only patients meeting inpatient criteria. If testing is to be expanded, primary care clinics will increasingly be tasked with this role and need the equipment and guidance to safely do so.
- **Clarify outpatient setting testing protocols and communications to doctors.** As patients have been directed to their health care providers by governments and media, the lack of availability of PPE and guidance on safety procedures to prevent spread to other patients in the clinic are slowing community clinics' ability to respond. Oklahoma Department of Health should work with community practices as well as larger systems to implement the rapidly changing guidance on who requires testing, where that testing is available and to provide clear instructions for patients who are sick but don't meet testing criteria.
- **Ensure that we have the tests and supplies in order to meet the demand. Set the appropriate public expectation of testing given and the scarcity of testing supplies at the present time.** We are concerned the demand for testing outweighs the supply.
- **Take additional measures to support healthcare workers:** Healthcare workers are essential to the COVID-19 response and serve at the center of the crisis. At the same time, these workers have their own health and family responsibilities to attend. Measures should be implemented immediately to support healthcare workers in need of childcare, mental health services, and support caring for ill family members.

- **Advocate for alignment between federal programs and the commercial insurers.** The lack of alignment is creating confusion and causing health care providers and their offices to waste valuable time navigating the conflicting policies.
 - All payers, public and private, should eliminate cost-sharing for testing
 - Eliminate all prior authorization for COVID-19 testing and care
 - Pay for telehealth at the same amount as in-person visits
- **Develop, if not already existing, procedures for those without insurance and provide that information on the Oklahoma State Department of Health COVID-19 hotline.** According to the US Census Bureau an estimated 548,000 Oklahomans lacked health insurance in 2018. The 2nd highest rate of uninsured in the country, making the need for clear procedures communicated a necessity.

Thank you for your leadership and attention to this important matter. The Oklahoma health care associations want to be partners in helping in this pandemic and we stand ready as the first line of defense. We urge you to look at the OAFP & cosigner organizations as a resource. We have the capacity to communicate with our members quickly and efficiently. These organizations could be an effective vehicle for keeping front line health care provider members informed and ensuring patients are safe.

Sincerely,



James Beebe, MD, CWSP

President

Oklahoma Academy of Family Physicians



Oklahoma Chapter
American Academy of Pediatrics
INCORPORATED IN OKLAHOMA



Cosignatories:

Oklahoma Association of Nurse Anesthetists

Oklahoma Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics

Oklahoma Hospital Association

Oklahoma Primary Care Association

Oklahoma Osteopathic Association

Oklahoma Nurses Association

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