HHS Inspector General reports on hospital COVID-19 experience

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of the Inspector General today released a report to provide policymakers with a national snapshot of hospitals' challenges and needs in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report is based on brief telephone interviews conducted March 23-27, 2020, with hospital administrators from 323 hospitals across 46 States. Interviews focused on three key questions:

1. What are your most difficult challenges in responding to COVID-19?
2. What strategies is your hospital using to address or mitigate these challenges?
3. How could government best support hospitals responding to COVID-19?

Among other concerns, hospitals reported experiencing widespread shortages in PPE; severe shortages in testing supplies and extended wait times for results; difficulty maintaining adequate staff; inadequate access to ventilators; and increasing costs associated with acquiring supplies and staff to address patient surge, and reduced revenues as a result of canceling non-emergent procedures.

ADHS Posts Staffing and Triage Crisis Standards of Care Guidance

The Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) convened the State Disaster Medical Advisory Committee (SDMAC) last week to discuss staffing and triage crisis standards of care. The Committee approved guidance for (1) crisis staffing in short-term acute care facilities, (2) pre-hospital triage and (3) identification and appointment of triage officers and clinical care directors in acute care facilities. The specific recommendations are as follows:

- **Acute Care Facilities should identify Triage Officer(s) and a Clinical Care Director.** Job Action sheets can be found in the [Arizona Crisis Standards of Care Plan](https://www.azdhs.gov/crises/crisisstandards/).  
- **EMS should communicate contingency status, changes in transportation, and consider changes in deployment strategies.**  
- **Facilities should develop and implement expanded staffing plans.**
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More information on the SDMAC and all adopted guidance can be found on the ADHS website for SDMAC.

Waiver Tracker

AzHHA continues to work with stakeholders on regulatory waivers and financial relief to assist hospitals and health systems in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are links to approved and pending requests, as well as our request letters to date:

Summary of Approved CMS Blanket Waivers

CMS Waiver Tracker Webpage, including information on waivers by provider type and state.

Additional CMS Waivers Approved for Arizona, March 30, 2020

AHCCCS Waiver Tracker Webpage

Summary of Approved and Pending AHCCCS Waivers

AzHHA March 31, 2020 Letter to ADHS Requesting State Licensure Waivers

AzHHA March 31, 2020 Letter to the Arizona Medical Board Requesting Regulatory Waivers

AzHHA April 1, 2020 Letter to AHCCCS Requesting Immediate Financial Relief for Hospitals

CARES Act; financial analysis

AzHHA last week emailed members hospital-specific estimates of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). The act provides financial relief and resources to hospitals impacted by the public health emergency. The analysis estimates how existing Medicare payments will be affected by some portions of the CARES Act, particularly temporary suspension of the 2% sequestration and delay of the Medicaid disproportionate share hospital payment cuts.

Several payment changes adopted in the CARES Act are excluded from the analysis due to lack of data and/or full detail on implementation. For instance, the Medicare add-on that increases the hospital Diagnosis Related Group payment for treating COVID-19 patients by 20% is not included since we do not have volume by Diagnosis Related Group of COVID-19 patients.

CDC issues guidance on the use of cloth mask

CDC posted guidance on the use of cloth face coverings on Saturday, April 4. This recommendation is for wearing face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, such as grocery stores and pharmacies. The
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recommendations include patterns, fabric choices and washing instructions. Find more information on the CDC website HERE.

COVID-19 Updates
Ensure your hospital response team is on AzHHA’s COVID-19 member advisory distribution list. Visit our website https://www.azhha.org/covid19 and sign up to receive future member advisories and COVID-19 updates.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic status, AzHHA is sharing its member advisory with all Arizona hospital and healthcare members in an effort to get you the information you need to care for patients in your communities.

Questions? Contact us at Communications@AzHHA.org.