

VMG COVID-19 UPDATE

Friday, April 3, 2020

Issue # 14

It's Friday afternoon and most of VMG will have the weekend off. We all need time to recharge, relax, distance from the pangs of social distancing at work for a while. The news continues to worsen, as expected. The scammers are out there selling miracle cures, "game changers," and the hoarders of needed equipment, supplies, food (anyone seen a chicken recently? They're not all crossing the road).

Despite this, maybe because of this, we're seeing a remarkable coming together by all of you, our communities and services, and it is heartening, fulfilling, and reinforces the values of healthcare. A quote from a *New Yorker* article by a NYC doctor, *Dhruv Khullar*, working as a hospitalist in an unnamed hospital:

The "burnout-inciting frustrations of billing and documentation and electronic medical records have, for the moment, receded. Now, when I'm in the hospital, the focus is so singular, the mission so clear, that nothing else seems important. There is nowhere that I, or my colleagues, would rather be. There's an odd sense in which the pandemic has made the practice of medicine into what many doctors hoped it would be." He also goes on to talk about concerns about being able to sustain and that is a real concern for everyone. But coming together, having a unified purpose, and talking with each other and offering support and "being there" will help.

Local Initiatives

There are a number of task forces getting together in our communities to plan for and cope with "surge" concerns. The latest status of our hospitals is that they have capacity now. Steve is participating for us in meeting of the Hampshire County group today. We're also participating with Baystate Franklin in some "emergency credentialing" in case we need to be available to help out.

Checking In is More Than Just That

One of our practitioners learned of a message from a patient in response to a check-in call by another practitioner. The patient said that she was moved to tears and also said "what medical group does this?" I'm glad it's us.

Language about Virtual Visits

We were told that some patients don't fully understand what we mean by a "virtual visit." It's a good shorthand for us but it may sound to some patients like a video game or something less than a healthcare service. We're looking to change our language to patients probably to something like video or phone visit (that's what they are, after all).

To Mask or Not to Mask

We are already committed to wearing surgical masks at all times in the health centers. We should probably also be wearing masks (homemade ones will do for the purpose) in public.

There has been some conflicting messaging about this since the start of the pandemic. But as information changes, so do the recommendations. There may be a national or state recommendation today or tomorrow.

The mask will likely not prevent us from getting the virus. But it will help to prevent us from transmitting the virus to others if we have it. So break out the creativity and fashion sense if you choose but mask up. And it is a sign of social solidarity which is also needed.

Lab Draws

Another sign of how quickly things change and how our staff are adapting. We are now doing a majority of our lab draws *in the parking lot*. Thank you to the phlebotomists and other staff involved in making this happen. You're making everyone safer.

Department Updates

Eye Care: Our Optometrists are not seeing patients in their offices now for social distancing reasons. And the NHC Eye Lane and Optical Shop have been repurposed for our NHC Respiratory Symptoms Unit. However our Optometrists are available for consults to primary care and patients. We'll have more information on the best way to reach them soon but, for now, please contact any of the Eye Care staff who are either working from home or in the centers working on managing in boxes and patient cases to the practitioners.

Podiatry: Dr. Erskine and Dr. Dinnall are both doing visits by video and/or telephone (aka Virtual Visits -- VV) in increasing numbers. They will both see urgent visits (infections, ingrown toenails, post-ops, wound care, etc.) in the office (though we may be consolidating these in person visits to EHC and GHC). All future visits for the next few months are being converted to VV. New patients are also being accepted.

Sports Medicine: Dr. Murphy is seeing more and more visits by video or telephone and finding many patients who really appreciate the opportunity to discuss their pain or other symptoms. He is also seeing new patients by video or phone. Please keep referring. Injections and other hands-on treatments will be postponed or scheduled for a few months out (or longer).

So it is now almost the weekend. Again, thanks for all you do, for coming together and showing your True Colors. Here's a video of appreciation to take you into the weekend (you can skip the ads if you wish): https://youtu.be/lqWQCWc_zCc

Be Patient; Be Mindful.

Joel