

VMG COVID-19 UPDATE

Friday, June 5, 2020
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Issue #

We've reached the end of a very somber week. But not the end of our hope for progress against racism, health and social inequities, and brutality in all its forms. I was listening/participating in a town hall last night with some very angry young black men, ex-gang bangers. It was difficult to listen to the pain and despair. But then, in the midst of all the invective, you could hear the wishes to be a part of things, to participate, to provide for their families and children. One of the key things talked about was health care access. And access to good food ("not the bodega on the corner filled with junk food"). And safe streets. And good, public education. Those are the hopes. Sound similar to your hopes? Can we find a way to help people participate in the promise of our society? Can we stand together?

Having participated in the 60's struggles for equality, this all feels eerily familiar. But my wife has pointed out to me that there is something this time that does seem different. There are a lot more younger people, people of all races, involved. Maybe that will do it, move us forward. We're going to find out. Let's work together.

For those of you with young children (or even for those that don't have young children at home), CNN and Sesame Street are presenting a Town Hall tomorrow morning, *Coming Together: Standing Up to Racism*. It's on CNN at 10AM. I'd recommend it for all of us.

Paul Carlan told me about a story on NPR yesterday entitled *Too Much To Lose: How A 'Very Strategic' Holyoke Protest Delivered Message Without Incident*. There are ways to come together that work for all. Here's a link to the story:

<https://www.nepr.net/post/too-much-lose-how-very-strategic-holyoke-protest-delivered-message-without-incident#stream/0>

National, State and Regional

It's been about 2.5 months since the pandemic "hit." That's enough time for the word to get out about the measures we have taken (social distancing, etc.) as well as for fatigue to set in with those measures. And then we have the more recent demonstrations for social justice that have, to a large extent, captured us all and led to many people "relaxing" the social distancing, mask wearing, precautionary measures against the virus. Here is the message again: stay vigilant. If you (or friends or family) are going to protest, stick with wearing a mask, try to stay at a distance wherever possible and help others to do the same, as possible.

We're starting to see reports in the news about vaccine production starting. That's good for the supply line getting established but the vaccines have not yet been studied enough and they have not yet been proved *safe and effective*. It will be many months before that is established. So, as a reminder, the

vaccine producers are starting the supply chain hoping to be ready if and when they are proven. We can't count on that yet.

In the meantime (or in "quarantine time" as Stephen Colbert says), across the country, the *Washington Post* reports that at least 1,864,000 cases have been reported; at least 106,000 have died. And the CDC Director testified that he is worried that Americans are not following COVID-19 advice whether because they are participating in rallies protesting racial injustice, crowding into pools and parties (as they did recently in Missouri) or watching the recent SpaceX launch together. "Public health messages on masks and social distancing are not resonating with the public." We can do something about that. Talk it up. As gamblers return to Las Vegas, they are probably gambling on more than just their short term "fortunes."

We'll hear from the Governor tomorrow about whether Massachusetts will continue to Phase II of reopening on Monday. Cases and mortality numbers in the state seem to be going in the right direction for now. Our region is especially stable for now.

At VMG

There is not much new at VMG today compared with yesterday. We are continuing our plans for slow and steady return of services and providing services in alternative, safer-in-a-pandemic ways. Another example from AMC about accommodations, from Amy Rice:

"As you know we are moving forward with our outdoor care in the back parking lot with Mobile lab draws starting on Monday June 8th. The large Outdoor Office tent is also now up in the back, which has displaced Amherst Pediatrics from using the back parking lot. As of Monday June 8th, Amherst Pediatrics will move to occupy 4 parking spots in the front lot. Amherst Pediatrics will have signs up on Monday designating their spots as their outdoor care parking spots."

From Gina:

Staff across Valley Medical Group (reception, triage nurses, medical assistants and even practitioners) schedule appointments with patients. As we do this, in this new world of virtual visits (video and telephone) it is very important to convey key information to each patient:

- ✚ Video visits are preferred over telephone visits, and whenever possible when scheduling offer video as the preferred appointment type.
- ✚ Please thank the patient for scheduling the video/telephone appointment, and state their insurance will be billed as occurs with an appointment in the health center.
- ✚ If a patient were to have additional questions about insurance (reception staff may hear this more often), you may share: "Most payers are not imposing cost sharing (copayments, coinsurance, or deductibles) for virtual visits. However, please check with your insurance on whether your insurance has any cost associated with the visit." Many payers have already communicated with their members about their copay and patient responsibility policies.

That's all for today. Have a great weekend and.....

- Please wash your hands (often),
- Don't touch your face,
- Maintain social/physical distancing (it works),
- Definitely wear a mask (it is not a political statement; it's a public health good),
- Continue to be in touch with and take care of each other, and help to educate everyone.

Be well,

Joel

Be patient; be mindful

P.S. Here are a few videos. The first is something/someone we should all watch, listen and hear from time to time but especially now:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=130J-FdZDtY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aor6-DkzBJ0>

And finally, to another place:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xctzp0dp9uc>

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