

# VMG COVID-19 UPDATE

Wednesday, April 1,  
2020

Issue # 12

The VMG Board of Directors met this morning (virtually). All Board members wished to pass on their appreciation for all of your dedication, creativity, and willingness to step up during this public health emergency. Thank you from the VMG Board of Directors.

## Regional and Local News

There is some cautious good news to share about social distancing effects, local hospitals and ICU availability. Some in state government are now saying that they are seeing early signs that social distancing seems to be working to slow the spread. It's too early to confirm and they are still predicting the peak effects of the virus for mid-April. As you know by now, the Governor has extended the Stay at Home guidance through May 4.

Local hospitals (Cooley, Franklin, Baystate) are reporting that they have increased their ICU capacity and have some room for a surge (so long as it is not a surge the size of NYC); they are not yet seeing a great increase in demand. We will keep trying to keep patients who don't need it from the ER. Also, some area nursing homes are setting aside areas (floors or buildings) for COVID cases.

So while these are good signs about impact and readiness, we still have a long way to go. And there are still areas of the country like Florida (whose governor just now issued a stay at home message) and Texas in which the need for social distancing has not taken hold. That means that travelers, if there are any, could carry back the infection. It's uncertain how big a threat that is to us but it is certainly a threat in those states. If you have family or friends in those areas, pass on the advice about social distancing. Maybe that will help.

## Virtual Visits (VV) Increasing

We are seeing an increase in virtual visits in most departments. We are beginning to track them weekly and we can report on that by next week sometime. This is important for several reasons. First, we want to stay connected with our patients and virtual visits do bring in revenue. Second, almost all patients have concerns and anxieties about the pandemic and we can help provide perspective for them. Perhaps most important, our patients still have other (than COVID) medical problems with needs for care. Think of the folks with high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, for example. They all need monitoring and time to check-in, review medications and symptoms, etc. VVs are a good way to see them for now and most patients appreciate the opportunity.

## Behavioral Health and Integrated Behavioral Health Update

Here's an update from John Novo and Suellen Walsh. All Behavioral Health and IBH providers are working from home providing regular therapy sessions over the telephone or telemedicine platforms. We are providing services to new and existing patients. Providers have reached out to patients who have cancelled and reception has been actively calling patients and converting already scheduled in-office appointments to Virtual appointments.

There has been a decrease in patient's flow for some BH providers. We are working hard to be flexible and accessible. Our goal is to support primary care and VMG in general as much as possible and to keep our schedules full. Please continue to make referrals and let us know of any problems in having access to our services. We are here to help and want to do our part to support our patients and the practice in this very difficult time.

Referrals should be made by instructing patients to call the usual behavioral health phone numbers (AMC 256-4441, EHC 282-3858, NHC 586-8400, GHC 772-3367) to leave a message. For IBH, a reception staff member has been designated at each health center to schedule virtual visits. Please contact them.

Ordinarily, this being April 1, I would think about adding some kind of "foolish thing" right now (*These Foolish Things*; great song). Instead, here's a link to a video from students and faculty at Berklee College of Music in Boston. It's really good and I think inspirational.

<https://www.golocalprov.com/articles/what-the-world-needs-now-bostons-berklee-college-of-music-video-goes-viral>

Thanks again for all you do. And....wash your hands, don't touch your face, maintain social distancing.

Be Patient. Be Mindful.

Joel

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