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March 5, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

On behalf of the more than 440 multispecialty medical groups and integrated delivery systems, representing about 175,000 physicians who care for one in three Americans, I encourage you to direct the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to expeditiously implement the telehealth waiver authority recently authorized as part of H.R. 6074, the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2020. This emergency supplemental appropriations bill includes a provision to allow Medicare patients to access telemedicine services for coronavirus (COVID-19) treatment.

Our member medical groups work diligently to provide high-quality, cost-effective, patient-centered medical care. AMGA appreciates this is an evolving public health crisis that will require a concerted effort from across the healthcare sector to not only stem the spread of this highly-contagious disease, but also to treat those who have contracted COVID-19. Our members take pride in their ability to help in this effort, but will need the support of the federal government to do so. Congress recognized the need for such support by enacting legislation to waive the otherwise applicable telehealth requirements in the Medicare program.

This emergency legislation authorizes Medicare to waive telehealth restrictions during the coronavirus public health emergency. Allowing our providers to deliver treatment via telehealth technology will better enable them to adhere to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for healthcare providers to respond to COVID-19, which explicitly recommends healthcare facilities consider strategies, including leveraging telemedicine technologies, to prevent patients who can be cared for at home from presenting at a medical facility. Appropriate use of telehealth technology has the potential to minimize disease transmission and protect healthcare personnel.

Although beyond the scope of this immediate emergency, AMGA believes that Congress' action demonstrates the underlying flaws in the site-of-services limitations for telehealth services and how these limitations neglect the needs of many Medicare beneficiaries. Regardless of location, all Medicare beneficiaries deserve access to care based on what they and their providers determine is the most clinically appropriate.

CMS should immediately waive the geographic site-of-service restriction limits so that Medicare will reimburse providers for services delivered via telehealth. Expanding the use of telehealth will not only aid in COVID-19 triage efforts and slow the spread of the disease, but also better serve the needs of patients.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this situation. By acting quickly now, our members can focus their efforts on identifying and caring for their patients in the most appropriate setting, be it at home, a clinic, or hospital. Waiving the site-of-service restriction limits recognizes our best course of action is to ensure providers have all the resources they need to treat their patients.

Should you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Darryl M. Drevna, AMGA's senior director of regulatory affairs, at 703.838.0033 ext. 339 or at ddrevna@amga.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jerry Penso".

Jerry Penso, M.D., M.B.A.
President and Chief Executive Officer
AMGA