Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services: Recommendations for Restarting Non-emergent Non-COVID-19 Health Care

AMGA Summary

On April 19, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released recommendations to re-open facilities for non-emergent non-COVID-19 related healthcare services. CMS initially on March 18 released guidance on how to limit non-essential care in order to maintain healthcare system capacity. CMS’ recommendations in this guidance are the first in a series that may aid healthcare systems and facilities in regions with low incidence of COVID-19 infection as they consider resuming in-person care of non-COVID-19 patients.

In its guidance, CMS highlights that states and regions that pass the White House’s April 16 Gating Criteria may proceed to Phase 1. Additionally, non-COVID-19 care should be offered in states, localities, or facilities with the resources and capacity to respond to a surge of COVID-19 cases. In its recommendations, CMS urges providers in areas where re-starting in-person care is being considered to coordinate with state and local public health officials to evaluate trends and incidences in COVID-19 cases. Additionally, CMS recommends that providers evaluate care necessity based on clinical needs and that surgical/procedural care and highly-complex chronic disease management be prioritized.

Additional CMS recommendations include:

- Establishing Non-COVID Care (NCC) zones that would screen all patients for symptoms and taking steps to reduce exposure and transmission of COVID-19. These areas should be separate from other facilities to the degree possible.
- Ensuring healthcare providers and staff utilize proper personal protective equipment (PPE) at all times. Additionally, patients should wear bought or homemade cloth masks.
- Routinely screening staff and all patients for COVID-19 symptoms.
- Ensuring that staff working in NCC zones are limited to the NCC zone and do rotate into “COVID-19 Care Zones.”
- Establishing a plan for thorough cleaning and disinfection prior to using spaces for patients with non-COVID-19 care needs.
- Maintaining adequate staffing levels to cover any potential surge in COVID-19 cases.
- Testing patients before care when adequate testing capability has been established. Staff in the facility should also be screened by laboratory test regularly.

Facilities should monitor whether their region continues to be a low-incidence area and be ready to cease non-essential care if a surge does occur.

The guidance is available on the CMS website.