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Long term care leaders address state orders on hospital admissions to nursing homes

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Mark Parkinson, President & CEO of the American Health Care Association (AHCA) and Dr. David Gifford, Chief Medical Officer for AHCA issued the following statement addressing state orders directing nursing homes to accept all hospital patients:

“Multiple states are considering adopting an order similar to what was issued in New York that requires every nursing home to admit hospital patients who have not been tested for COVID-19 and to admit patients who have tested positive. This approach will introduce the highly contagious virus into more nursing homes. There will be more hospitalizations for nursing home residents who need ventilator care and ultimately, a higher number of deaths. Issuing such an order is a mistake and there is a better solution.

“As a former governor and a former state public health official, we completely understand the intent of the orders. Every governor and public health official are faced with the unprecedented prospect of hospitals being overrun with both COVID-19 patients and other patients who in the regular course of life need hospital care. That is already happening in Seattle, New York City and surrounding areas. No one wants a scenario where hospital beds and ventilators are unavailable and people die waiting for care. Discharging hospital patients who are well enough to be cared for elsewhere is a top priority.

“Recent data from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that just over half of all elderly people who tested positive for COVID-19 showed no symptoms. CDC found that these people were likely spreading the virus to others for up to seven days before they developed symptoms. This supports a ‘test before discharge’ approach in hospitals. However, lack of testing and delays in getting test results make testing patients before discharging unworkable. We need a different approach.

“The solution is for hospital patients to be discharged to nursing homes that can create segregated COVID-19 units and have the vital personal protective equipment (PPE) needed to keep the staff safe. Sending hospitalized patients who are likely harboring the virus to nursing homes that do not have the appropriate units, equipment and staff to accept COVID-19 patients is a recipe for disaster. Governors and public health officials should be directing nursing homes

to create as many segregated units as possible right now. They should also explore asking nursing homes to move residents from one nursing home to another to create dedicated COVID-19 facilities that can accept hospital discharges. As a profession, we have made these recommendations, but we need state officials to waive regulations that limit our actions. We also need to find ways to work with state public health agencies to get the necessary PPE to nursing homes so they can accept hospital patients.

“The nation’s nursing homes are more than willing to care for COVID-19 patients. Taking care of the elderly, despite all the challenges and criticism, is what we are all about. There are examples all over the country that show that well-equipped and well-staffed nursing homes can contain the virus.

“We will work with every governor, public health official and hospital to identify nursing homes that have the capability to handle these transitions and provide this care. In return, we need their commitment to fight for us: to get PPE into all nursing homes; to waive existing regulations getting in the way of training more staff and moving residents; and to support efforts to hire and retain additional staff while we fight this battle. Strategically sending patients to the appropriate nursing homes, as opposed to forcing them into every nursing home, will save lives and reduce the burden on hospitals.

“America’s nursing homes are ready to be the solution. Let’s safely transition hospital patients to the settings where they have the best chance to recover, and those around them have the best chance to stay healthy.”

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ABOUT AHCA/NCAL

The American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL) represents more than 14,000 non-profit and proprietary skilled nursing centers, assisted living communities, sub-acute centers and homes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. By delivering solutions for quality care, AHCA/NCAL aims to improve the lives of the millions of frail, elderly and individuals with disabilities who receive long term or post-acute care in our member facilities each day. For more information, please visit www.ahcancal.org.