



THE OHIO SOCIETY
FOR POST-ACUTE AND
LONG-TERM CARE MEDICINE



The Academy of
Senior Health Sciences Inc.

March 31, 2020

Governor Mike DeWine, Lt. Governor Jon Husted
77 S. High St.
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted:

As we move from planning to action as we ramp up Ohio's healthcare system, our associations felt it imperative to bring to your attention a policy we believe threatens the health and safety those Ohioans most vulnerable to COVID-19, and ask for your assurance and partnership as we build new care systems to assist COVID-19 patients.

Specifically, we are concerned and troubled with New York State's order to nursing homes which gives nursing homes no discretion in accepting COVID-19 positive individuals. The order states that, *"No resident shall be denied re-admission or admission to the NH solely based on a confirmed or suspected diagnosis of COVID-19. NHs are prohibited from requiring a hospitalized resident who is determined medically stable to be tested for COVID-19 prior to admission or readmission."*

Isolation of patients has been a key strategy towards containment of the virus in countries that have been successful in controlling the spread of COVID-19. We know that no health system in the world was built to withstand this illness, and it would be tempting to redeploy nursing homes, which would typically be seen as a well-equipped setting care setting to respond to Ohioans critically ill with COVID-19.

The fatal flaw, of course, is that these settings are already filled with individuals who call them home, who have high risk of mortality compared to their counterparts. Across the country, nursing homes that have been seeded with the virus have experienced mortality rates of 15-30 percent, and in the case of Life Care Center in Kirkland, the mortality rate exceeded 50 percent.

The current shortage of PPE and lack of widespread testing capability will further hinder attempts to curb the spread of infection in nursing homes. In more than one Ohio nursing home, the vector has been a health care worker. Without PPE and testing, Ohio nursing homes are inadequately equipped to mitigate transmission. In this context, a policy which requires they admit patients would guarantee an overwhelmed health care system. Examples from other states demonstrate that one or two nursing home with uncontrolled spread can quickly overwhelm a city's health system.

Furthermore, we believe that Ohio has time to build a viable alternative, which is to create COVID-dedicated units. Already we are aware of one nursing home operator who has stepped forward to volunteer over 2,000 beds to care for COVID-dedicated care and rehabilitation units. We also know that many nursing homes will have cases despite their best efforts at prevention, and many have already worked to empty halls and spaces in anticipation of the surge. Other alternatives include field hospitals rapidly built in spaces like convention centers, dormitories, and other vacant spaces. Any of these alternatives are safer than a blanket policy requiring indiscriminate admissions.

We encourage you to develop and disseminate a protocol that would do the following:

- Encourage the development of COVID-19 isolation centers that address a wide variety of care needs. While it may be feasible to isolate lower-acuity individuals in centers set up within convention centers and dorms, it is preferable to care for them in existing nursing facilities dedicated to COVID-19 patients;
- Explicitly reinforce nursing homes' discretion in admitting or declining to admit COVID-19 positive individuals;
- Require testing for individuals with respiratory symptoms before they may be discharged to a nursing facility; and
- Once testing becomes more accessible, require testing prior to discharge to a long-term care setting, to further prevent transmission.

To date, we have been proud of Ohio's thoughtful and deliberate pandemic response. We believe that our recommendations regarding nursing home admissions will continue that course, and contribute towards flattening the curve. Know that Ohio's nursing homes are alongside you in this effort, as we work to protect Ohio's most vulnerable.

Respectfully,



Thomas Lehner, MD, CMD
Board President, Ohio Medical Directors Association



Kathryn L. Brod
President/CEO, LeadingAge Ohio



Pete Van Runkle
President/CEO, Ohio Health Care Association



Chris Murray
President/CEO, Academy for Senior Health Sciences