



Department of Health

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

HOWARD A. ZUCKER, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner

SALLY DRESLIN, M.S., R.N.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

April 2020

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to express my deepest, most heartfelt thanks to all the amazing healthcare providers—doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists, social workers, assistants, aides, technicians, therapists, and so many more—who are truly fighting on the frontlines to save the lives of those suffering from COVID-19.

Although I am here in Albany working on this issue in my role as Health Commissioner, I remember with much clarity my decades working as an intensivist, as an anesthesiologist, and specifically my days as a doctor in New York City hospitals. When I see media images of you working exceptionally long hours and when I hear you talk to reporters during your shifts, I can sense what you're going through. I know what it means to juggle multiple patients, to give 1000%—and then to find the strength to give more.

Despite your physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion, it is the passion of saving a life—the commitment to a calling larger than humankind can imagine—that keeps you in motion, always moving toward the next patient. This strength of character is emblematic of the best of humanity. I vividly remember trying with every ounce of my being to save someone's life but not being able to. I know what is required of you to walk from that patient's bedside and muster the inner fortitude to help the next patient and the next and the next. And those trips home after long days and nights at the hospital—I know how filled they are with reflections of those work hours. Such reflections often become lifetime memories. Many will include your role in contributing to a wonderful outcome, but others will be more painful to recall.

I imagine that being the only person at a patient's bedside during his or her final moments is one of the most emotionally wrenching experiences in a medical career. With no relatives around because of infectious risk, you are the person who helps that patient cross the final threshold. I hope that all of you find strength in your colleagues. From decades of work with health professionals, I know that they generously open their hearts to their peers as well as their patients.

I want you to know that New York State and the Department of Health are doing everything we can to protect you in your lifesaving work. We have an entire team working to secure PPE from around the globe, and our Hospital Capacity Coordination Center is sharing information about supplies and capacity among all hospitals so that needed equipment will be rushed to hospitals with greatest need and patients can be transferred to reduce stress on overburdened hospitals.

We are also working to expedite testing to ensure your safety including diagnostics as well as antibody testing. We have issued Discontinuation of Isolation and other guidance for healthcare personnel to help frontline staff safely return to work.

We know that many of you need temporary housing to be able to manage rigorous work schedules, and we continue partnering with the private sector to provide hotel housing for frontline medical workers in all outbreak regions. And we are working continually to help our frontline workers by researching potential COVID-19 treatments. We are also working with hospitals at therapeutic options for patients with COVID-19.

Together we will get through this, and I hope you can find strength from knowing that you have personally helped save so many lives during this trying time—that you will have been instrumental in allowing a parent to see their child grow up, a sibling to be at the next holiday gathering, a grandparent to see a new grandchild, a friend to be a friend to another for many more years.

The greatest gift we can give is the ability to help someone today so that he or she can share in the best of tomorrows. It is you who will help New York State and the entire nation weather this storm of uncertainty and triumph. On behalf of the State of New York, we thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Howard". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.