



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE
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March 18, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC), we are writing to urge you to include a provision to allow respiratory therapists to deliver services by telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic. The AARC is a national professional organization with membership of over 45,000 respiratory therapists and whose organizational activities impact over 150,000 practicing respiratory therapists across the country.

AARC applauds the swift action you have already taken to address this public health crisis. In particular, the provision expanding the use of telehealth during this emergency included in the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act (Pubic Law 116-123) is an appropriate response under these circumstances – allowing Americans to receive the care they need without exposing themselves to the virus unnecessarily and by ensuring hospital resources are reserved for those most in need. Unfortunately, this provision does not apply to respiratory therapists who are serving as frontline practitioners to treat those who have tested positive for the virus. AARC urges you to include a provision allowing respiratory therapists to deliver care to patients via telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic in the next legislative package to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

Respiratory therapists who are licensed and nationally credentialed are needed now more than ever. They specialize in providing pulmonary diagnostics and care to patients who suffer from respiratory conditions like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, pneumonia, lung trauma and other respiratory-related diagnoses including COVID-19. Their services on multiple fronts are essential in combating the coronavirus and saving lives. Yet, respiratory therapists are not able to furnish telehealth services to individuals in their homes despite the recent actions taken by Congress and the administration.

To ensure patients receive critical services during this time, Congress should include a provision allowing respiratory therapists to furnish telehealth services during this public health emergency in the next COVID-19 response legislation. Such telehealth services would enable these highly trained professionals to:

- Keep at-risk individuals out of hospitals by addressing the usual non-COVID-19 related respiratory conditions (e.g., flu, pulmonary infections, asthma attacks, COPD exacerbations, etc.);
- Expand access to respiratory therapists, especially in rural areas, by allowing them to provide evaluations and assessments of patient's needs without face-to-face visits;
- Avoid the need to put high at-risk patients with underlying respiratory conditions in the emergency department/hospital mix to lessen their exposure to COVID-19 positive patients through self-management education and training

AARC and our members stand ready to help Congress and the administration address the COVID-19 pandemic. Allowing respiratory therapists to deliver services via telehealth would be a critical step to ensuring patients receive the care they require without overburdening our limited healthcare resources. We look forward to working with you to address this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact Anne Marie Hummel, Associate Executive Director for Advocacy and Government Affairs, at anneh@aarc.org if you have questions or desire additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen S. Schell".

Karen S. Schell, DHSc, RRT-NPS, RRT-SDS, RPFT, RPSGT, AE-C, CTTS
President