



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE
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April 14, 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), I urge you to recognize respiratory therapists for the lifesaving care they are delivering to patients with COVID-19 by specifically recognizing them as essential health care providers in any legislative provision authorizing hazard pay for essential workers, like the Heroes Fund proposal, and allowing them to deliver care to Medicare beneficiaries via telehealth. 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.

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease and, now more than ever, respiratory therapists, along with physicians and nurses, should be recognized as essential to combating this deadly virus. Respiratory therapists are essential health care providers when it comes to management of individuals who have been mechanically ventilated and play a critical role in monitoring and assessing the patient's respiratory needs and response to therapy. Working together as part of the health care team, they are the highly trained experts who monitor settings to ensure the ventilator is operating properly and that the settings are adjusted as the patient's condition changes. These dedicated professionals put their own health on the line every day to save lives and to combat this deadly novel virus.

Besides the essential role respiratory therapists play in treating patients with COVID-19, they also play a critical role in delivering care to patients with chronic respiratory conditions, like COPD, during this pandemic. The AARC has sent a letter to the Vice President and to the Surgeon General recommending that the White House Coronavirus task force include the respiratory care profession in future discussions as the Administration continues its goal to bring this deadly pandemic under control.

We applaud the recent actions by Congress and the Administration to expand the use of telehealth during the national public health emergency. 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 is an appropriate response under the circumstances. Unfortunately, when the

nation needs them most, respiratory therapists are not included among those professionals who can furnish telehealth services. In a letter to you dated March 18, 2020, the AARC urged you to include a provision in the next legislative package addressing the COVID-19 pandemic to allow respiratory therapists to deliver telehealth services during this public health emergency to Medicare beneficiaries with chronic respiratory disease as well as those quarantined who have tested positive for COVID-19 in a setting that mitigates risks to them and others.

We appreciate the work that Congress has done thus far to address the public health emergency, and request that next COVID-19 response package recognize the work of respiratory therapists whose dedication and selfless contributions are critical to the nation's well-being.

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