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EPIC

The Magazine of the Georgia College of Emergency Physicians



Summer, 2020

President's Message

As a member of Governor Kemp’s Covid-19 Healthcare Task Force and President of Georgia College of Emergency Physicians (GCEP), I am fortunate to be at the intersection of medicine and government. Governor Kemp has been very receptive to the recommendations of the task force. His executive order to increase medical liability protections during this pandemic is huge for physicians. This is a critical necessity during a time that we might have to ration medical care – including ventilators. When we as physicians have to make decisions based upon the greater good for society versus on an individual patient basis, the Governor’s executive order provides some protection.



The lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) is the one thing that saddens me on a personal level and professional level as president of GCEP. Some of my colleagues on the frontlines have been out of PPE for weeks. Many are conserving and reusing “single use PPE”. Some have developed garage “set ups” to sterilize their N95 masks for reuse. The silver lining in all of this is that the generosity of people has been overwhelming. Many non-medical sectors, including aeronautical (N95 masks), industrial (face shields), game fishing (protective gowns), fashion (washable shoes) have donated PPE to healthcare workers.

Physicians are facing unprecedented financial strain due to significant decreases in volume and therefore revenue. Most practices have furloughed employees with uncertain time frames of return. Non-emergency care has essentially shut down across the nation with possible long-term ramifications downstream – delayed cancer diagnosis with cancelled routine screening exams, etc.

This pandemic is a wonderful learning opportunity on deficiencies of our preparation, need to implement social protective measures earlier on the curve, and stockpiling of PPE. The future is certainly unpredictable, but we will always be stronger if the house of medicine works together and stays together across all specialties.

John L Sy, DO, MS, FACEP
President of Georgia College of Emergency Physicians

Surprise Medical Billing Update

Brett Cannon, MD

We've finally had some good news on the Surprise Medical Billing (SMB) front in Georgia. (As much as I’d

punch and won the name battle, so I’m grudgingly going to use SMB).



The early part of the 2020 Georgia legislative session was very active with meetings, discussions, calls, and emails about surprise bills. There was a definite feeling that this was the year something was going to get passed, which created both the opportunity to capitalize on all of the work that had been done over the past several years, but also a concern -- that same momentum could carry a bad bill across the finish line.

When the legislature reconvened mid-June, there were two nearly identical bills that are live. Both bills successfully passed out of their respective chambers, SB 359 passed unanimously (54-0), and HB 888 with a 164-4 vote. On June 17th, the Senate passed the house version, unchanged, 53-0.

What was different this time around? [Reading over the bill](#) you’ll see that this bill takes a very different approach than in years prior. For out-of-network care provided at in-network facilities, insurers must pay either the average in-network rate, the previously contracted rate, or a higher rate as determined by the insurer. If there’s not an agreement, the independent dispute resolution (IDR) process provides a baseball-style arbitration process, where a professional arbitrator chooses between the provider’s and insurer’s final best offer, with the loser paying for the cost of arbitration. This is designed to be a simple process using document submission – not an in-person or lengthy exercise. There isn’t a threshold dollar amount to qualify for IDR, and similar claims can be bundled. Finally, there’s an elective care exemption process.

This is not to say it’s a perfect bill, and there are still unknowns associated with it. It’s unlikely that there will be funding to set up an All-Payer Claims Database, so the data source for determining in-network rates remains unclear. And much of the execution of the bill and arbitration process will reside with the office of the insurance commissioner. We believe he and his office will act fairly and in good faith, but this is a new and complex process so there’s going to be a steep learning curve at a minimum.

It’s particularly important that Georgia, as well as several other states, continue to make progress on the SMB front. The White House and various Senate and House committees continue to struggle amongst themselves to emerge with the answer to SMB on the federal level. States that have successfully addressed SMB with reasonable legislation can serve as guideposts for enacting equally reasonable solutions for the nation.

Finally, there are many people and organizations who should be thanked for getting us to this point. To name a few, GCEP, MAG, PFC, our lobbyists Travis Lindley and Devin Kreci with Capital Strategy Group, PFC lobbyists Laura Norton and Don Bolia from Peachtree Government Relations, Mayor Derek Norton from MAG, and Chip Pettigrew, who was giving testimony on SMB before many of us even knew it was an issue. And finally, there are many senators and representatives who have provided critical support over the years on this issue, and this year we should also note the support received from the Governor’s office. But two people have to be mentioned and thanked – Representative Lee Hawkins who championed the House bill, and no one has been more of a supporter or a bigger advocate on the issue over the many year fight than Senator Chuck Hufstetler. If you see any of them, please join me in offering our most heartfelt thanks for their efforts.

Financial Impact Of COVID-19

By: Nolan Pendleton, CFP, MBA & Ben Yin, MBA

Similar to the health effects of this pandemic, COVID-19 likely will continue to affect your finances for years. Whether in private practice, employed by a health system or under a 1099 model, keep these tips in mind as you navigate these turbulent times.

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PPP Loan Forgiveness Updates

For those who qualified and obtained a PPP loan - good news! With the passing of the Paycheck Protection Program Flexibility Act of 2020, several restrictions have been loosened:

- The period in which the funds must be spent increased from eight weeks to 24 weeks.
- The percentage of funds required to be utilized for payroll decreased from 75% to 60%. The remaining 40% can be used for qualifying expenses like rent, mortgage interest and utilities.
- For those funds not forgiven, the payback period increased from two years to five years (at 1% interest).

Student Loan Relief Under the CARES Act

- Payments have been suspended for most federal student loans through September 30, 2020 and no interest will accrue.
- Great Lakes, one of the largest student loan servicers, committed a coding error that potentially impacted nearly 5 million borrowers. The error reported incorrect information to the credit reporting agencies, causing the suspended payments to reflect as “deferred” rather than “on time.” This could negatively impact your credit score and if you have a loan serviced by Great Lakes, be sure to check with them to see if you were impacted.
- The interest rates on student loans are at historic lows so now is a great time to consider refinancing. Even if you have refinanced recently, take time to review what options you have available as there are no (or should not be) any closing costs or prepayment penalties. Additionally, while there is often a substantial discount in the interest rate charged for a shorter term loan versus a longer term loan (e.g., a 5 year versus a 20 year), the difference between the two rates is also at historically low levels. Because of the very low “spread,” it may make sense to go with a slightly longer payback period.

Your IRA Under the CARES Act

- Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) are not required for 2020.
- Early withdrawals before age 59 1/2 of up to \$100,000 are not subject to the standard 10% penalty.
- Withdrawals of up to \$100,000 this year can be reported as income spread out over three years. You can also choose to repay these funds within three years of the withdrawal.

Stock Market Volatility

While the stock market constantly moves up and down, COVID-19 has significantly amplified those moves. For some context, per the Wall Street Journal, the S&P 500:

- Started 2020 at 3,244
- Peaked on February 19 at 3,393
- Bottomed on March 23 at 2,191 (a 35% decrease from February highs)
- As of June 19, it is back to 3,097 (a 41% increase from February lows)

While the S&P has moved more than 35% in each direction this year, as of June 19, 2020, it sits down only 4.5% from where it began the year. How does one navigate these constantly changing waters? With a well thought out plan. If you had acted on financial


the markets. As the great philosopher Michael Gerard Tyson (aka Iron Mike) once said, “everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.” If the last 4 months isn’t a punch in the mouth, we don’t know what is. If you’ve never taken the time to develop a plan, **NOW** is the time. What are you waiting for...a global pandemic?

Nolan and Ben can be contacted at Nolan@GenerationMD.com | Ben@GenerationMD.com or via their website, GenerationMD.com, where they help physicians plan for today, plan for tomorrow, plan for GENERATIONS. Visit for great resources, including a free copy of the book, *Myth of the Rich Doctor*.

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Member Mondays

Have you been featured in one of GCEP's #MemberMondays posts? If not, we want to hear from you! [Click on this link](#) to participate. It's a fun, light-hearted way to learn more about your GCEP colleagues outside of the ER! Check out some of our featured physicians below.



MEMBER MONDAYS

How well do you know your colleagues?

Hobbies:
Fly fishing, travels, gardening, whitewater kayaking, attending live theater

If you weren't an Emergency Physician, what kind of physician would you be and why?
Epidemiologist - I like using analytical and mathematical skills and traveling

If you weren't a physician at all, what would your career be?
Fly fishing instructor or college math professor

What's your "Rock Star" job?
Astronaut or crew member on first successful Mars space venture

Anything else that is unique about you that you'd like to share?
Enjoy spiritual conversations and study

Ralph Griffin, MD

Hometown:
Macon, GA

Been in Georgia:
32 years

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MEMBER MONDAYS

How well do you know your colleagues?



Sandra Jean Carmichael, MD

Hometown:
Sioux City, IA /
Rising Fawn, GA

Been in Georgia:
Full time since 1991

Hobbies:
Hang gliding, writing science fiction, international travel, gardening, loving my big dogs, sadly depleted at the moment

If you weren't an Emergency Physician, what kind of physician would you be and why?
I wouldn't be a physician, instead I would be an astronaut to Mars. Or the chief physician on the Moonbase.
Star Trek was my survival vehicle during adolescence and I actually started out in ROTC as an aerospace engineer with full scholarship.

If you weren't a physician at all, what would your career be?
See above or work at CDC combining my Anthro/archeo degree with my MD

What's your "Rock Star" job?
Astronaut to Mars or the Stars, could go as a doctor. Alternatively, the Wilderness/EM physician on a big dig in Mongolia, China, anyplace!

Anything else you want to share:
My sibs are an interesting bunch and my Bio-Dad allegedly saw the photos of the Roswell aliens. Mom applied to the challenger program and came up in the 500 last candidates, but single with a small child pushed that away.

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