

March 25, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Dept. of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

Re: COVID-19 – Utilizing All Available Licensed Health Care Professionals

Dear Secretary Azar and Secretary DeVos:

On behalf of the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) and its 39,000 members, I am writing to you to request that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) collaborate to enact measures to bolster the supply of health professionals available to combat the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). HHS should consider addressing state scope of practice restrictions on licensed health professionals, such as dentists and dental hygienists, who could otherwise provide voluntary emergency care to patients in various healthcare facilities across the U.S. in response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. This action by HHS, would provide the opportunity for ED to incentivize emergency response volunteerism by dentists and other young health professionals of all stripes by promising student loan debt relief for their service during this crisis.

We have already seen the initial adverse impact that COVID-19 presents to the United States, including our nation's health, economy, and social stability. The AGD is actively monitoring the COVID-19 situation and is advising member dentists to discuss COVID-19 with dental staff and to communicate to patients to ensure that standard precautions, in compliance with CDC guidelines, are being followed (<https://agd.org/coronavirus>).

HHS and states could potentially take action under authority granted through *the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Reauthorization Act* (Public Law 113-5) to ensure dental health assets are being fully utilized in the COVID-19 response. Licensed dental health professionals have medical knowledge and capabilities that would enable them to perform tasks associated with caring for patients in various healthcare settings. With hospitals and other healthcare facilities facing the challenges related to an already overworked workforce in response to COVID-19, we need to fully leverage our nation's supply of licensed health care professionals.

The Administration should consider taking action to provide or promise targeted student loan debt relief to licensed health professionals who are currently combatting COVID-19 or are in a position to feasibly volunteer their services. This action would build on the President's promise to provide student loan relief through 0% interest rates on loans and administrative forbearance to borrowers who request it during this national



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emergency. Many young health professionals are going above and beyond in helping stem the adverse impacts of this public health crisis. We believe there is a critical opportunity to spur additional volunteerism by young health professionals in challenging this crisis, through the enticement of relieving a meaningful portion of their student loan debt.

We look forward to continuing to work with you during this critical time to protect the health of our nation. The AGD appreciates your leadership and stands ready to work with you to address this unprecedented public health threat. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Daniel J. Buksa, J.D., Associate Executive Director of Public Affairs, by phone at (312) 440-4328 or via email at daniel.buksa@agd.org to let us know how we may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Connie L. White, D.D.S., FAGD'. The signature is written in a cursive style.

Connie White, D.D.S., FAGD
President
Academy of General Dentistry