



APhA

AMERICAN PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION
Improving medication use. Advancing patient care.

April 1, 2020

Acting Assistant Secretary

Loren Sweatt, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health

c/o: Kandyce Ingram, Special Assistant

U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)

200 Constitution Avenue, NW

Room Number N3626

Washington, D.C. 20210

Dear Acting Assistant Secretary Sweatt:

On behalf of the more than 300,000 pharmacists serving the needs of patients and communities during the COVID-19 crisis, we request your Agency's assistance in clarifying the level of protection pharmacists and pharmacy staff should have on the front-line of patient care in the community. Reports and concerns expressed by pharmacists within communities across the nation have dramatically increased. Yet, these pharmacists and pharmacy personnel continue to serve their communities without proper personal protection equipment (PPE) and procedures, lack of compliance with social distancing from patients and customers, and the fear of getting sick. Many don't have access to proper masks, gloves or protection procedures as resources are prioritized for hospitals. Pharmacists report their employers do not consistently provide gloves or masks. These employers may often be lower in supply chain priority list for access to PPE and thus, unable to provide sufficient protection. Clearly this could be a supply issue that will resolve. However, implementation is highly variable for social distancing mechanisms such as home delivery, curbside or drive-through service or implementing barrier windows or directional signage to minimize contact with and among patients.

APhA represents our nation's pharmacists, pharmaceutical scientists, student pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and others interested in improving medication use and advancing patient care. APhA members provide care in all practice settings, including community pharmacies, specialty pharmacies, hospitals, long-term care facilities, community health centers, physician offices, ambulatory clinics, managed care organizations, hospice settings, and the uniformed services.

As pharmacist activities can span between medium and high-level exposure as described in OSHA's existing guidance document,¹ we ask for specific public guidance or a statement from OSHA regarding the protection of practitioners caring for patients outside of hospital settings including pharmacists practicing in community pharmacies. OSHA's support is critically needed

¹ OSHA. Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19, available at:
<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

to inform safer environments for essential health workers, such as pharmacy staff, during this pandemic. Strong guidance or a statement from OSHA on the protection of pharmacists/pharmacy staff, and acknowledgement of the importance of these individuals to our nation's mitigation, response and prevention efforts will influence government and corporate efforts in protecting front-line employees and drive consistent application across the nation.

Pharmacists in community settings spend time speaking with and counseling patients on a one-on-one basis to ensure their privacy. Pharmacists' patient care by its nature regularly exposes pharmacists to symptomatic and asymptomatic patients. Pharmacy staff do not know whether the individuals coming into pharmacy practices are carriers or COVID-19 or not, as they could be asymptomatic. In the exchange of insurance cards, paper prescriptions, goods, cash, and credit cards, there is a constant fear. This, combined with limited mention of practitioners outside of hospitals in public statements, has led to, in our opinion, sub-optimized protective procedures and a discounting of risk. In addition, pharmacists are strong advocates and providers of immunizations but are becoming hesitant to provide immunizations because of lack of appropriate protection. This lack of access could further exacerbate public health concerns. We are concerned about pharmacists' and their staffs' ability to meet community needs without appropriate protection.

We need clear, formal, specific public OSHA guidance or a statement to employers, suppliers and regulators on the priority and essential nature of protection of pharmacy personnel, especially those who are providing direct patient care services such as immunizations, testing, screening and face-to-face patient education and medication management services. Pharmacists are committed to serving the needs of their patients and communities and need the support of the nation's agency responsible for addressing the safety of workers. We offer whatever assistance we can and look forward to receiving appropriate public and clear guidance from your Agency. If you have any questions, or if we can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Michael Baxter, Senior Director of Regulatory Policy, at mbaxter@aphanet.org.

Sincerely,



Thomas E. Menighan, BSP Pharm, MBA, ScD (Hon), FAPhA
Executive Vice President and CEO

CC: The Honorable Eugene Scalia, Secretary, DOL