

# A MESSAGE FROM THE APTA ALASKA PRESIDENT

## UPDATE ON COVID-19

Hello APTA Alaska Members:

It has been a week full of updates, press conferences, and adjustments to the many ways in which the novel coronavirus and COVID-19 have shaped the world we live and work in. Sadly, today marks the first loss of life in Alaska. With so many lives lost, it is important to acknowledge the effects on family and community and self reflect on our own lives. I have heard from many members about their successes, concerns, questions, and ideas related to our current state of affairs. I am always impressed at the resiliency, creativity, persistence, and intrepidity of our members and Alaskans in general.



There have been no official changes in mandates relating to the delivery of health care since my last address on March 22. The mandates and advisories can be reviewed here:

Anchorage: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6816400-Eo-03.html>

Ketchikan and Fairbanks: [Refer to Mandate 7.1](#)

State: Specifically Refer to [Mandates 5.1 and 9.1](#)

To paraphrase from 5.1: **Mandate 5.1 - Elective Procedures**

*All patients, providers, hospitals and surgical centers are **required to postpone or cancel all non-urgent or elective procedures for three months** to decrease the overall impact on the Alaska health care structure and preserve personal protective equipment. This would include pre-scheduled surgeries deemed non-essential. This mandate does not apply to surgical cases coming through the emergency room or for an existing hospitalized patient.*

Our APTA Alaska Payment Chair, Katie Piraino, compiled an exceptional bundle of information regarding telehealth billing in Alaska. That document was the result of synthesizing massive amounts of data from many sources. We are very fortunate to have Katie voluntarily working so hard for our members. It is a shining example of what we can accomplish as a volunteer organization. Billing and coding for telehealth will be a laborious chore, but we are fortunate it is an option, so please try to see it in that light. The document can be viewed on our website [HERE](#).

There are 2 focuses of this address moving forward.

First, and most important, is to review our role in the broader public health picture in terms of assisting to slow the exponential rise of new cases in Alaska. If the slope of new cases can be dampened or slowed, our medical system can handle the influx. If the rise in cases spikes exponentially as a worst-case scenario, our ability to manage the demand from a hospitalization standpoint will be inadequate and will be a medical catastrophe.

That's where we need to do our part and see only essential/urgent cases in outpatient settings to decrease the potential exposure to the public and ourselves. As APTA has echoed, some patients need us and as professionals we can make that clinical decision. Without our help, the medical system will be overly taxed with falls, acute pain, inability to self care and the system will be taxed. Some acute injuries will lead to needless permanent impairments without our intervention. The rest, should be put on hold or seen via telehealth. Every clinic should act responsibly and limit exposure as much as possible.

"Business as usual" is a thing of the past. Patient numbers will recover, but now is the time to act prudently with screening procedures, sterilization, protection, and most important, limiting unnecessary exposure. Follow CDC guidelines. There are new standards and we need to do our part.

The State of Alaska PT/OT Licensing Board is working on more specific language to clarify what essential means. If we, as a profession, do not act responsibly, we will be part of the problem and also risk our autonomy in the future as critical health care professionals.

Second, APTA Alaska has started a simple initiative to provide an avenue for you to act now to help those in need. AKPTsHelp! is a program where you can sign up on our website as a volunteer to help someone in our community. We have two lists:

[Individuals Wanting to Help](#)  
[Those Needing Help](#)

From there we will match people to those in need. This can be something as simple as shopping for someone at high risk or as involved as volunteering at a clinic or shelter to assist. We will be finding organizations for the need help list and going from there.

Like many situations in life, this one reminds me of my favorite book about mice. "*Who Moved My Cheese*", by Spencer Johnson. The basic premise, when things change dramatically from the comfortable status quo, look for ways to act to improve. Don't waste your energy being nostalgic about what was; pivot your energy to something positive. AKPTsHelp! is one such opportunity and I hope it helps countless Alaskans and PTs and PTAs focus their new time and potential frustration in a positive direction.

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