

A MESSAGE FROM THE APTA ALASKA PRESIDENT

Hello APTA Alaska Members,

Since I addressed you just 3 days ago, there has been the predicted increase in COVID-19 cases in Alaska and throughout the world. As more testing is done, more diagnoses will be confirmed. With this ongoing situation, of course there is a heightened anxiety and concern for ourselves, our co-workers, our staff and our patients. It has been heartening and humbling to hear directly from so many members regarding their beliefs and ideas for how we should be proceeding as a profession. There are massive differences in how our membership sees our role in this pandemic with the topic of greatest concern being related to the operation of outpatient physical therapy clinics.



It is important at this time to take all information for synthesis and follow the CDC and local recommendations and mandates to accomplish the priority, slow the spread of the virus and keep the public healthy. There have been new guidelines published for Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Ketchikan and it's likely there will be something for the Kenai Peninsula in the near future. Tonight Alaskan physicians called for stay in place and a travel ban as well.

Click [HERE](#) for the Anchorage "hunker down" policy, under the direction of Mayor Berkowitz that went into effect at 10 pm on Sunday night.

Click [HERE](#) for the latest DHHS information regarding Ketchikan and Fairbanks mandates:

These Alaskan communications encourage caution and continued care of routine medical problems including physical therapy.

At the national level, Dr. Sharon Dunn, APTA President, released another statement on Friday addressing the pandemic. She addressed the difficult decisions and confirmed the [position of APTA](#) that professionals are best suited to make decisions on which patients should be seen. She stated regarding the ongoing services offered at outpatient clinics:

"That's why the APTA Board of Directors felt that the best approach is to rely on the professional judgment of physical therapists - because care decisions should be based on a specific person's needs and a risk/benefit analysis for the individual, not simply by the setting in which the care is provided. The COVID-19 outbreak changes the factors we must consider in our professional evaluation, but it does not change our basic responsibility to do what is best for our patients. As licensees, physical therapists are empowered and obligated to make those decisions."

On March 19, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security updated the Memorandum of Identification of Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers During Covid-19 Response. You can see the Memo [HERE](#).

This publication from the Department of Homeland Security outlines the "essential critical" nature that physical therapists embody in times of national crisis. We can assist in decreasing ER visits, visits to urgent care centers, and to primary care clinics by assisting our patients with essential needs. This is why we have direct access in so many states and it is recognized at this time. Your decision to continue practicing at this time, whether in a clinic or via telemedicine, is your professional judgment and yours alone. However, when my practice demands further decrease due to more patients staying home on my directive, I plan to find a way to help in this crisis as a health care provider. There will be needs for us to pivot our focus to a versatile workforce helping with screening, testing, whatever it takes. Just like our ancestors during the polio epidemic which thrust our profession to the forefront; we are now called upon to assist for the better of society and our local community. We will be called upon in ways that are difficult to predict, assisting those with special needs, helping in acute and non-clinical capacities as well.

This is a quote from the document referenced above:

"If you work in a critical infrastructure industry, as defined by the Department of Homeland Security, such as healthcare services and pharmaceutical and food supply, you have a special responsibility to maintain your normal work schedule."

Additionally, According to Dr. Matos, an expert in biologic surety and the management of select agent programs at federal facilities:

"Physical therapists are essential in flattening the curve of the COVID-19 pandemic. They play a key role in keeping people they can help out of doctor offices and ERs. This will not only free up the medical teams to treat those impacted by COVID-19, but also limit the exposure of those seeking the care of the physical therapist."

Take all appropriate precautions to protect your patients and yourselves (particularly those of us who are in a high risk category), but if your business shuts down, continue to be a physical therapist or a physical therapist assistant and do what you can do to assist. There is nothing better for the immune system than caring for others. Despite our differing opinions, I take tremendous pride in the spirit of our members and non-member PTs and PTAs in this state: 465 members and 1200 licensees overall. Imagining all the help we can provide is a great thing to look forward to in this moment of need. Thanks in advance for being trusted, versatile healthcare providers. Best of luck to all of us.

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President, APTA Alaska