

June 25, 2020

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Inside Address

Email:

RE: Telehealth Services

Dear

Established in 1943, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) is a professional association with nearly 7,000 members in the United States, Canada and 72 other countries. This membership includes allergist/immunologists (A/I), other medical specialists, allied health and related healthcare professionals—all with a special interest in the research and treatment of patients with allergic and immunologic diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in waivers, regulatory changes and new flexibilities regarding telemedicine that have revolutionized healthcare provision for at risk persons and the safety of patients and providers. With the approaching expiration dates of telehealth expansion, the AAAAI strongly urges all payers to extend the deadline for all expanded telehealth services for at least 90 days beyond the expiration of the nationwide Public Health Emergency, if not permanently.

COVID-19 is not going to disappear anytime soon, and the situation may certainly worsen in the fall, particularly when combined with a flu season. It will be difficult for practitioners to differentiate cases of influenza from COVID-19 and be able to ensure the safety of staff and patients without the ability to interact virtually and direct patients to care and care sites that are best suited for them. It will also be difficult to maintain adequate social distancing in the office when the need for care increases in the fall and winter, as well. To maintain this, offices have had to limit waiting room space, leading to limited capacity to see patients when the need arises.

Allergists typically care for patients with chronic disease, which include asthma, immune deficiencies, and chronic sinus disease which may increase their risk for COVID-19 or increase severity of COVID-19.

(more)

Recent evidence has shown that many of these patients have been reluctant to seek their usual care because of the fear of becoming infected with COVID-19, at a time when monitoring and control of disease is so important. Telemedicine has allowed us to maintain contact with these patients and ensure that their disease is controlled.

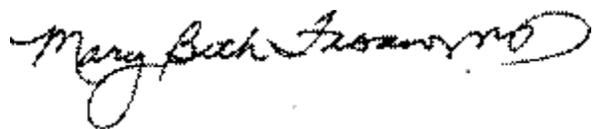
Delay in medical care during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic will likely lead to an increased demand for services as communities lessen some of the stay-at-home orders and restrictions, but medical offices need to be careful in order to provide a measure of safety for staff and patients. The supply of PPE remains restricted, and combined with the need for social distancing, will further limit our ability to provide in-person care. Telemedicine has allowed allergist/immunologists to provide care without time limits to patients in the comfort of their home.

Many health care providers are burdened with a loss of childcare or are at high risk themselves, and telemedicine has allowed these providers to remain in the workforce and continue to provide care to patients whom need it.

The AAAAI thanks our payers for their rapid expansion of telehealth policies to date and urges payers to continue this beyond the expiration date of the Public Health Emergency, if not permanently. This virus will continue to be an issue until a safe and effective vaccine is available and the population has had a chance to receive it.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If we can provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Sheila Heitzig, our Director of Practice and Policy, at sheitzig@aaaai.org or 414-272-6071. She will facilitate further communication with AAAAI leadership. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mary Beth Fasano, MD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "M".

Mary Beth Fasano, MD, MSPH, FAAAAI
President, American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology