July 21, 2020

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), which represents all 260 accredited PA programs that collectively graduate more than 10,000 new PAs each year, we are writing to thank you for your continued work on a vigorous federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As frontline PAs across the country continue to provide high-quality care and PA programs work to prepare the future workforce, PAEA greatly appreciates the support that Congress has provided for institutions of higher education, students, and patients through the CARES Act and looks forward to continued collaboration as the pandemic evolves.

As negotiations over the next COVID-19 response bill continue, we would like to emphasize the critical importance of including appropriate liability protections for institutions of higher education that take needed precautions in accordance with guidelines published by the CDC and the American College Health Association to protect students, faculty, and staff from infection. At the outset of the pandemic, uncertainty and limited availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) forced the institutions that house PA programs and clinical training sites to delay or cancel scheduled clinical rotations for students. According to PAEA’s COVID-19 Rapid Response Report 1, over 75% of programs were forced to suspend...
some or all of the scheduled clinical rotations for their students.¹ Unpublished survey data currently being compiled by the Association indicate that this disruption has led nearly 30% of programs to delay the transition of students to the clinical phase of their programs, and 24% of programs to delay the date of program completion for some or all students. At a time when the importance of a sufficient supply of well-trained frontline PAs has never been more apparent, it is critical that Congress take appropriate steps to minimize potential future disruptions in the clinical education of students.

As the supply of PPE has improved in recent months, due in large part to significant federal investment, many programs have been able to allow students to return to clinical sites to complete their training. Through appropriate precautions such as program-provided PPE and clinical policies that restrict student exposure to patients potentially infected with the novel coronavirus, many programs have been able to both protect students and minimize disruption in the progression of their cohorts.¹

While programs have made progress in resuming clinical education, the resurgence of coronavirus infections in recent weeks has had a significant impact on institutional planning for the 2020–21 academic year. Given the importance of a continuous supply of health care providers for both the response to COVID-19 and future public health emergencies, it is critical that institutions base their instruction plans on their ability to ensure students are protected rather than on fear of litigation. **For this reason, PAEA urges you to provide, in the next COVID-19 response package, protection from liability to institutions of higher education that can demonstrate that they have instituted established precautions in accordance with published guidelines to protect students from infection.**

We welcome the opportunity to serve as a continued resource to you and your staff on COVID-19 and other health workforce issues. Should you have specific questions, or if you would like additional information, please contact Director of Government Relations Tyler Smith, MPH, at 703-667-4356 or tsmith@PAEAonline.org.

Sincerely,

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