

## Medical Services Recommendations

The Medical Association of the State of Alabama recognizes the enormous economic impact COVID19 has had on our economy including the healthcare system. Physicians and their staff, hospitals, nurses, and everyone on the health care team have been severely impacted from both a public health perspective and an economic perspective.

Utilizing the experience of both perspectives, physicians encourage a gradual re-opening of medical services that can continue to slow the spread of COVID-19 and allow for an opportunity of increased business activity.

We applaud the Governor and Dr. Scott Harris for seeking the input of stakeholders on the best ways to potentially restart medical services and are pleased to make the following suggestions:

### **Ensure Protection of the Health Workforce**

- 1) Testing needs to be available for all patients coming into a physician's office or having surgery. If pre-op testing is not available for all patients, priority needs to be given to cases such as cancer, abdominal surgeries, cases that may require intubation, or any case where there could be aerosolization. Patients should be tested pre-operatively with a protocol on how to test and what to do with the results.
- 2) PPE needs to be widely available to protect the health care workers.

### **Facility Considerations**

- 1) The availability of PPE supply in all hospitals must be given due consideration so that facilities all have a reasonable chance to re-start their elective surgeries around the same time.
- 2) Elective procedures should be restarted slowly based on need and urgency. The last group to restart should be the pure elective cases.
- 3) Administrative controls and facility design must allow for appropriate social distancing
- 4) Staffing levels must remain adequate to cover a surge in COVID-19 cases

Bringing patients back to physician offices, hospital campuses, and surgery centers may cause some uneasiness for patients and staff. In order to reassure all involved, a number of safety measures should be established to reduce the risk of transmission, including a robust screening process; universal masking for all patients, visitors and staff; and enhanced cleaning of surfaces, equipment, and patient care areas. With these safety measures in place, physicians should be allowed to continue to exercise their professional judgment in providing care to ensure continuation of treatment and prevention necessary to avoid serious harm from an underlying condition or disease, or necessary as part of a patient's ongoing and active treatment.

Finally, in order to contain the spread of positive cases, a robust system of contact tracing needs to be in place so as to isolate and monitor those that have been exposed to the virus. With reduced shelter at home policies in effect, the ability to identify positive cases and act quickly to minimize exposure will be critical.