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Illinois State Dental Society



Education • Legislation • Communication

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April 20, 2020

The Honorable J.B. Pritzker
Governor, State of Illinois
207 State House
Springfield, Illinois 62706

Dear Governor Pritzker:

On behalf of the more than 6,700 Land of Lincoln dentists who are members of the Illinois State Dental Society (ISDS), thank you for being a trailblazer with COVID-19 and for the countless hours your Administration has dedicated to protecting our communities. Our members—comprising nearly 70% of the state's active licensed dentists—are small business owners, employers, employees and above all, front-line healthcare providers who have the safety and well-being of their patients at heart.

In keeping with your “Stay at Home” Executive Order No. 8, almost 100% of Illinois' dental offices are closed to all but emergency procedures. This has served to keep hundreds, if not thousands, of dental patients out of hospital emergency rooms, allowing more availability for treatment of medical emergencies and testing potential COVID-19 patients.

Illinois' dental community has clearly demonstrated our commitment to reducing the spread of COVID-19 by strongly supporting your initiatives and mandates, both by our actions and through all Society communications. In addition, the ISDS Foundation, Chicago Dental Society Foundation, local dental societies and individual members have voluntarily donated personal protective equipment that is in scarce supply or unobtainable and infection control supplies for use at medical facilities where the need is dire. Our dental society and member dentists have humbly gone above and beyond the call of duty without any public acknowledgment by the State.

Unfortunately, that commitment has come with a significant cost. Research by the American Dental Association's Health Policy Institute shows dentists are already feeling negative impacts deeply, and the situation will only worsen over time. National polling results found that 4% of dental practice owners believe they will be unable to sustain their practices even if the shutdown ends in late April. With a late June end date, that figure jumps to 18%. And if offices remain closed until late August, 46% say their practices will not survive. Our profession is at a crossroads, and time is of the essence to preserve dentistry as we know it.

Despite this bleak outlook, Illinois dentists continue to treat emergency dental care, because of ethical obligations and ultimately knowing that their actions will help to end this pandemic. Unfortunately, more and more dental offices have been forced to close altogether because they lack the available personal protective equipment (PPE) necessary to safely provide emergency care. Standard supply chains have been significantly disrupted and are difficult to timely rely upon to provide PPE. As always with dentistry, preventive measures are paramount to preventing more serious issues from occurring.

We ask you to apply this same principle immediately to the PPE shortage dentists are facing, before dental emergencies become a burden on our state's health systems. We also ask that you please consider providing PPE from the State of Illinois' procurements to our unsung heroes who continue to treat dental emergencies.

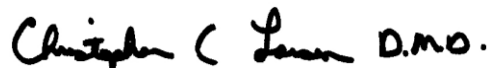
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Additionally, ISDS is seeking your Administration's guidance on returning Illinois' dental practices to business, and we hope to partner with the state to develop a plan. As you may know, dentistry has a long history of effective safety and infection control measures that it would be more than willing to provide expertise and share. ISDS has recently formed a committee to investigate clinical parameters of reopening dental practices and would be a proud partner in these efforts for all State of Illinois businesses. No dental office will be able to simply open its doors the day an order is lifted and treat patients as usual. They will need to bring staff back to work or even hire new staff; reconstruct appointment schedules; adjust treatment plans; restock supplies (especially for the dentists who have donated hundreds of thousands of masks, gloves, gowns and other PPE to fellow front-line workers); ensure equipment is fully operational; institute new safety and infection control systems and protocols, and more. We will also need time to inform our patients and the general public of new precautions and measures that will reassure them of the safety to return to the dental office for treatment, and what to expect when they present at their dentist's office.

The ADA is currently working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop post-crisis ramp-up and recovery plans from a clinical and infection control standpoint. However, business guidance and input from our state—including preparations to reopen while closures remain in place—will be instrumental in effectively positioning Illinois' dental practices for post-crisis success and optimal oral health care for your constituents.

In closing, thank you again for your commitment to guiding Illinois through these unprecedented times. As you know, dentistry is a giving profession year-round, with dentists providing treatment to the needy and underserved for little to no reimbursement as well as charitable care through our Mission of Mercy events, veterans' programs, Donated Dental Services, or simply in private practices. We hope you will agree that a strategic, multifaceted and comprehensive plan to bring Illinois' dental practices back to life is a critical part of "Opening Up America Again" and that we can establish a meeting date soon to discuss our thoughts further.

Respectfully,



Christopher C. Larsen, DMD
President

cc: Deputy Gov. Sol Flores
Deputy Gov. Christian Mitchell