

Quiet Heroes Fighting on the Pandemic Frontline

We are bombarded daily with shocking images of the wrath of COVID-19 around the world. We are anxious and afraid about what will happen to us. Our hospital in East Hawaii, Hilo Medical Center (HMC), is preparing for the worst. It has well-thought out medical emergency disaster preparedness plans in place to address the potential threats of this pandemic.

Our hope is that this viral tsunami never reaches our shores. We can never overprepare for a disaster of this magnitude and we need to strongly support our hospital in this effort.

Meanwhile we have a cadre of 50+ private, individual community physicians in the trenches trying to manage and educate a total of 50,000+ patients on Hawai'i Island so the tsunami never overwhelms our hospital. These physicians have not shied away from seeing their patients. Our most recent survey shows that the majority of primary care clinics are open during regular business hours and are available by phone, Facetime and telehealth. Most clinics are small independent businesses with limited PPE inventory, running on very tight budgets. They are working smart by screening patients carefully, seeing those who absolutely need to be seen while protecting themselves. Offices are small so some have patients wait in their cars instead of their waiting rooms to distance them from other patients. They fulfill a vital educational function by counseling patients on when to get the COVID-19 test, how to protect themselves and their families and how to handle anxiety and stress.

A significant number of our providers are over 60 years and in spite of the risk to themselves and their staff, are on the front-line filling prescriptions, ordering COVID-19 tests and counseling patients who have been forced to forgo needed procedures and specialist consultations. They have changed their office workflows and are trying to quickly figure out how and if they can get paid for non-face to face visits. Physicians who receive capitated payments from HMSA worry that with massive worker layoffs they will have fewer patients and significant losses in income.

Please think of these silent heroes in our community who are trying to keep patients from being admitted to the hospital now and for the foreseeable future. They are all running low on **cleaning, sanitizing supplies and toilet paper**. To protect themselves and patients they desperately need **N95 and surgical masks with loops, gowns, goggles and face shields**. They are working hard now and for the rest of this year to slow the pandemic curve. They know their patients well and are in the best position to manage them effectively. We need to keep our silent heroes safe and protected.

East Hawaii Independent Physicians Association is open to receiving donations of the items noted above to distribute to our independent healthcare providers. Please contact jvital@ehiipa.com or 808-797-3113.

Mahalo for your understanding and support,

Susan Mochizuki, Executive Director, East Hawaii Independent Physicians Association.