COVID-19 Update – September 2, 2020

Chester & Delaware County Medical Societies

The September 1st COVID-19 Zoom Conference for Chester & Delaware County physicians and other medical professionals included hospital based and community primary care and infectious disease physicians, as well as many other specialists and sub-specialists. Other participants included behavioral health professionals, nurses, representatives from health insurance companies, long-term care facilities, health care attorneys, and staff from the Pennsylvania Medical Society.

This conference was the twelfth in a series of evening Zoom calls that were coordinated by the staff and leadership of the Chester & Delaware County Medical Societies.

The program ran from 7:00 pm until 8:15 pm. Dr. Bruce Colley, (CCMS President) and Dr. George Avetian, (DCMS President) welcomed everyone on behalf of the county medical societies and encouraged all local physicians to become active members of their societies and the Pennsylvania Medical Society.

Dr. Brilliant reported that MAKO Labs is now performing COVID-19 testing for residents of Montgomery County through an agreement with county government and that patients are receiving test results within 24 hours. It was noted that MAKO Labs has partnered with TPIN (The Physicians Integrated Network) to promote better accessibility and reliability of testing and that medical practices, schools and other facilities that wish to provide testing should contact Dr. Brilliant at stuart.brilliant@tpin.com or call (484) 686-1008. More information on testing in Montgomery County is available at https://www.montcopa.org

During the “Round-table Update” the group heard from representatives of the medical staffs of the Crozer Keystone Health System; Main Line Health System; Chester County Hospital in the University of Pennsylvania Health System, and Christiana Hospital in New Castle County, Delaware. It was reported that testing is readily available throughout the region and that the number of tests being performed at hospitals and public health facilities has diminished over the past several weeks. It was further reported that the number of positive test results have also greatly diminished, although there is some apprehension about a possible spike in positive cases after the Labor Day holiday weekend.

It was reported that every hospital is testing patients upon admittance and that the average age of positive COVID-19 patients has changed dramatically since the first several months of the pandemic. The 20 – 29 years age group is now, by far the largest group of people who are COVID-19 infected although many may not exhibit serious symptoms. There are also many patients who have had a much longer battle with COVID-19 and that these “long-haulers” may present with a wide array of very challenging symptoms.
It was noted that medical practices and hospitals are now also preparing for the flu season and that restrictions on visiting hospital patients have eased some.

It was once again reported that tele-medicine is still an important aspect of the care being provided in the region and that most medical practices, hospitals and surgery centers have returned to regular procedures while taking great pre-cautions with each patient to avoid community acquired infection.

Dr. Hessen reported that a COVID-19: What’s Next? Preparing for the Second Wave Conference is being held as a virtual event September 11 – 12. The conference is a collaboration of the Society for Critical Care Medicine and the American Association for Respiratory Care with many other national specialty organizations and will feature the latest research findings, updates and resources. Anthony S. Fauci, MD will deliver the plenary lecture. For on-line registration and the conference agenda see the link at the end of this document. There is a $95 fee for this program and CME credits are available for participating physicians, nurses, pharmacists, respiratory therapists, physician assistants, nurse anesthetists and dietitians.

In a discussion addressing the re-opening of schools there were greatly varied opinions and it was noted that the Chester County Health Department has recommended that all K – 12 schools in Chester and Delaware Counties re-open with only a virtual platform until mid-October. In the ensuing discussion it was noted that most schools are offering only virtual classrooms, that some are offering a hybrid of in-person instruction and virtual classes and that some other schools will be fully re-opened in the coming days and weeks. There is concern by many physicians for school students who attend in-person classes and will acquire the virus through contacts at their schools and then infect their family members.

The group also briefly discussed plans for athletics to resume at the scholastic level, noting that contact sports will put students at greater risk until such time as a vaccine is available.

Curt Schroder, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Coalition for Civil Justice Reform (PCCJR) discussed the need for COVID-19 Safe Harbor legislation which would protect physicians, manufacturers and other businesses from liability associated with COVID-19. Mr. Schroder stated that Pennsylvania’s much needed recovery from the pandemic is threatened by the prospect of lawsuits and that if safe harbor is not given to our health care workers, health care providers and businesses as they re-open, Pennsylvania risks continuing economic stagnation.

While some very limited protections were put in place several months ago by Governor Wolf’s Executive Order, it provides inadequate protection for most physicians in the state. Several bills have been introduced in the General Assembly including SB 1239 which would offer the needed protection. Mr. Schroder reported that he and his PCCJR colleagues will be meeting in the next week with key legislators and participating in hearings to urge passage of SB 1239 before the legislature adjourns for the general election.
Mr. Schroder also provided an update on the proposed change in venue rules that are under consideration by the PA Supreme Court and would allow for lawsuits to be filed against a defendant in a county outside of where the alleged action took place. It was noted that the matter is presently under consideration in the court’s Rules Committee and that the committee is reviewing studies of the impact of the proposed change in venue rules.

COVID-19: What’s Next? Preparing for the Second Wave Conference Link:

Our COVID-19 Zoom Conference Call from 9/1/20 is available for viewing - Log on to the recording at:
https://zoom.us/rec/share/w81cKlfizmVI8E43IzV3nU_96PJ7iT6a8hihLqPQPmUexpQMsl6c53k1Jlc0Z7z1
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