



## **As COVID-19 Surges Nationwide, Intensivists, Critical Care Teams Plead with Americans to Rise to the Challenge**

*Statement from Lewis J. Kaplan, MD, FACS, FCCP, FCCM, President, Society of Critical Care Medicine*

COVID-19 cases are surging across the country amid the onset of the flu season. Already hospitals are at, or on the brink of, reaching full capacity. This is putting patients at risk and further straining an already overwhelmed healthcare system and its dedicated clinicians. The Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM), whose members are on the front lines caring for COVID-19 patients, is calling on all Americans to help bring down the rate of infection by following public health measures. This guidance includes wearing a face mask, practicing social distancing and hand hygiene, all while staying at home despite the holiday season.

There has been significant focus on the economic consequences of stay at home orders including the undesirable impact on workers at businesses large and small. Nonetheless, it is imperative that we understand the dire consequences of not embracing public health measures. These consequences include overwhelming health care facilities and exhausting clinicians, placing both patients and those who care for them at great risk. These key public health practices are effective at “flattening the curve” and enabling acute care facilities to meet critical and non-critical patient care needs.

Frontline clinicians have been engaged in pandemic care for more than nine months and they are fatigued. Many of them have contracted SARS-CoV-2 infection and are either acutely ill or struggling to recover. Throughout the course of the pandemic, many clinicians have lost their lives to COVID-19. These combined effects imperil patient care. Staff shortages are emerging and are compounded by increased departure from the field as well as decreased desire to train and then work in critical care-related disciplines. Burnout syndrome is prevalent and difficult to mitigate during such a prolonged period of clinician and facility strain.

SCCM’s tiered [staffing strategy](#) helped hospitals mitigate shortages throughout the pandemic. However, the current wave combined with the flu season—which often fills hospitals to capacity during a normal season—means that the shortage of staff and other resources will be magnified. During surges in the spring and summer, intensivists and critical care nurses were able to travel to the hardest hit areas to help colleagues fill staffing gaps and expand capacity at overwhelmed facilities. With the increase in acutely ill COVID-19 patients emerging simultaneously across all of our regions, this is no longer an option on which we – or our patients – can rely.

Clinicians and support staff at healthcare facilities have risen to the challenge of COVID-19 care, despite widespread obstacles and shortages. This has exacted a toll on their personal lives. Missed moments with family and friends in order to provide care are daily reminders of their priceless selflessness. To restore the ability to once again engage in the full range of our daily activities in and out of our homes, we again desperately need the public’s help. While the holidays generally usher in a season of hope, joy, and union, we must instead ask for aid in maintaining public health. The combined approach of mask

wearing, social distancing, and hand hygiene that was so effective early during the pandemic is critically needed once again. While doing that we also ask that you embrace hope. Vaccines appear to be on the near horizon as are novel treatments about which we learn more on a seemingly daily basis. To make this hope a reality we must once again care about – and for – one another.

#### **ABOUT THE SOCIETY OF CRITICAL CARE MEDICINE**

*The Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM) is the largest nonprofit medical organization dedicated to promoting excellence and consistency in the practice of critical care. With members in more than 100 countries, SCCM is the only organization that represents all professional components of the critical care team. The Society offers a variety of activities that ensure excellence in patient care, education, research, and advocacy. SCCM's mission is to secure the highest quality of care for all critically ill and injured patients. Visit [sccm.org](https://www.sccm.org) for more information. Follow [@SCCM](https://twitter.com/SCCM) or visit us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/SCCM).*