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Regular updates on COV-ID 19 at:

<https://www.facebook.com/amaactbranch/>

<https://www.facebook.com/AustralianMedicalAssociation/>

<https://www.ama-act.com.au>

<https://www.ama.com.au>

13 March 2020

Dear colleague

I wanted to get in touch and update some of the issues surrounding CO-VID 19 and the ACT particularly now that the first confirmed case has occurred.

Firstly, I wanted to emphasise the need to take care of your own health and wellbeing, that of your family, colleagues and practice staff, as you provide care to your patients.

Secondly, provide you with links and information on some resources available locally, nationally and via Avant.

Thirdly, I wanted to update you on the Federal Government's announcements made a few days ago in relation to telehealth consultations and 'pop up' respiratory clinics.

By necessity this will be a lengthy email and my apologies for that.

1. Taking Care of Your Health

As the CO-VID 19 situation develops, it's important that you and your colleagues are able to continue working where possible. PPE and appropriate in-facility protective measures are the only reasonable response.

Quarantining health workers who are asymptomatic but have had contact runs the risk of seriously and adversely affecting our health system.

We suggest you also carefully consider locum opportunities outside of the ACT you take up during this period, as contact with CO-VID 19 may well result in quarantine away from your home base. This is not to dissuade individual practitioners from assisting in combatting CO-VID 19 but rather so they are cognisant of the risks that may arise.

Please look after yourself and those around you as you provide care to your patients.

2. Available Resources

ACT

The **Chief Health Officer's alerts** can be found here: <https://www.health.act.gov.au/health-professionals/chief-health-officer-alerts>

And specific information for **GPs and Community Health Practitioners** here:

[https://www.health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/COVID-19 Advice for GPs 11032020.pdf](https://www.health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/COVID-19%20Advice%20for%20GPs%2011032020.pdf)

And **Hospital Practitioners** here:

[https://www.health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/COVID-19 Advice for ED clinicians 11032020.pdf](https://www.health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/COVID-19%20Advice%20for%20ED%20clinicians%2011032020.pdf)

The Federal Department of Health

The Federal DOH has published a CO-VID 19 alert with information specific to the health sector here: _

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert#information-for-the-health-sector>

Avant Mutual

Avant has published a series of updates and information for practitioners and practices that can be found here:

<https://www.avant.org.au/Resources/Public/Coronavirus/>

Non-GP Practice Signs and advice for staff

An AMA (ACT) member has provided a draft notice and information to practice staff regarding CO-VID 19. The draft notice may be adapted for your practice and a copy is attached to this email.

3. Federal Government Announcement

Earlier this week, the Federal Government announced new measures to assist is dealing with CO-VID 19. The major elements of the \$2.4bn package include:

[Note – see later update on www.ama-act.com.au for further details on new item numbers]

A new Medicare item for telehealth services

- A new Medicare item will be created so people at home in self-isolation and quarantine due to coronavirus can access health services and reduce the risk of exposure to others in the community.
- The new service will start on Friday and will be fully bulk-billed and allow medical, nursing and mental health medical staff to deliver services electronically via video conference or other means including FaceTime, Skype, WhatsApp, telephone call etc)

- Telehealth services would be available to:
 - People isolating themselves at home on the advice of a medical practitioner, in accordance with home isolation guidance issued by the Chief Medical Officer, and people who meet the current national triage protocol criteria for suspected COVID-19 infection after consultation with either the national COVID-19 hotline, state COVID-19 hotlines, registered medical or nursing practitioner or COVID-19 trained health clinic triage staff;
 - people aged over 70;
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 50;
 - people with chronic health conditions or who are immunocompromised; and
 - parents with new babies and people that are pregnant.
- The Federal DOH is communicating this to all GPs.
- Medical and other health practitioners subject to home isolation or quarantine would also be able to continue providing services to patients via telehealth, as long as they have the capacity to provide services safely and in accordance with normal professional standards from home or other isolation area.
- The service will run for an initial six months, following this period it will be assessed for ongoing use.

'Pop up' Respiratory clinics

- Up to 100 'pop-up respiratory clinics' will be set up across Australia.
- Respiratory clinics will be located in areas of need and they will be a one stop shop to be tested for those who are concerned they may have the virus. They will supplement the work of GPs and the state respiratory clinics.
- The aim of the clinics is to divert people with mild or moderate coronavirus symptoms away from hospital emergency departments and GP's and reduce the risk of the virus spreading, so that only severe cases present at hospitals.
- It is estimated each clinic will be able to see up to 75 patients a day over 6 months. They could operate as dedicated medical centres
- The respiratory clinics will be staffed by GP doctors and nurses.
- The Primary Health Networks will work with the AMA and RACGP and the states to find practices across the country in regional, rural and urban areas. 31 Primary Health Networks will get \$300,000 to assist in identifying and establishing the pop up clinic sites and distribute personal protective equipment.
- Up to an initial \$150,000 will be provided to help clinics set up and help offset losses from normal business.

Please provide any feedback or direct questions to the AMA (ACT) office staff on 02 6270 5410 or execofficer@ama-act.com.au

Best wishes

Dr Antonio Di Dio
President, AMA (ACT) Ltd