

**COVID-19**

**ASCP Advocacy on Behalf of Our Members and Patients**

**Showcasing the Lab Team’s Efforts Through “Laboratories on the Front Lines: Battling COVID-19”**

* As COVID-19 arrived in the United States, ASCP rapidly developed a plan to showcase the behind-the scenes work that our professionals and their laboratories across the nation are doing to care for our population. A docuseries was planned and ASCP CEO E. Blair Holladay, PhD, MASCP, SCT(ASCP)CM,traveled to several sites and highlighted the work of our members. The sites included NorthShore University Health System with Karen Kaul, MD, PhD; Cleveland Clinic with Gary Procop, MD, MASCP, and Brian Rubin, MD, PhD; University of Washington with Geoffrey Baird, MD, PhD, Interim Chair of Pathology, Alex Greninger, MD, PhD, Associate Professor and Assistant Director of Virology and many other UW leaders; UCLA Health System with Alyssa Ziman, MD, Omai Garner, PhD, MT(ASCP), Director of the Clinical Microbiology laboratory, Lee Hilborne, MD, MASCP, and laboratory professional Stephanie Horiuchi, MLS, SM(ASCP); and University of Nebraska Medical Center with Peter Iwen, MD, and Amanda Bartling, molecular laboratory technologist, and Steven Hinrichs, MD, Professor and Chair of the Department of Pathology and Microbiology and Director of Microbiology and Virology.
* ASCP launched a COVID-19 web resource page ([www.ascp.org/COVID-19](https://www.ascp.org/content/get-involved/institute-of-science-technology-policy/coronavirus-2019-(covid-19)-resources)) in early March 2019 to keep our members apprised of the latest developments related to the pandemic. The resource page is updated multiple times each week. The docuseries is featured on the webpage which is housed within the Institute for Science, Technology and Public Policy section of the ascp.org website.
* Media interviews have also been underway, including interviews with Gary Procop, MD, MS, MASCP, by National Public Radio, Sirrus Radio (March 30, 2020), and the Washington Post, as well as an interview with Dan Milner, MD, MSc(Epi), FASCP, by the BBC.

**Improving National Testing Capacity for COVID-19**

* As COVID-19 arrived in the United States, ASCP communicated to Alex Azar, JD, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to support allowing hospital and reference (commercial) labs to develop and use their own tests. ASCP’s letter (March 3, 2020) was developed as it was clear that the test developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was not working properly and that public health labs would not be able to meet testing demands. To ensure our position was communicated to the highest level, our position was communicated to Deborah Birx, MD, a member of the White House Task Force. Dr. Birx acknowledged our advocacy, saying it was “key.”

**Addressing Supply Shortages Related to COVID-19**

* ASCP submitted a letter to the editor (March 13, 2020) to the New York Times, raising concerns about potential supply shortages that could undermine commercial laboratories’ ability to meet COVID-19-related testing needs.
* ASCP launched an Action Alert (March 12, 2020) to our network urging President Trump and the Administration to work to address supply shortages that are hampering commercial laboratory efforts to meet current and future patient testing needs. So far, **25,000** letters to federal policymakers have been sent via the ASCP e-Advocacy Center. This Action Alert was also shared with the Intersociety Pathology Council so that other organizations could share it with their networks. Dr. Birx was also alerted to the actions of the members.

**Ensuring Workforce Readiness**

* ASCP released an Action Alert (March 21, 2020) in collaboration with the Association of Pathology Informatics (API) targeting HHS and CMS officials to urge that the CLIA certification requirements be relaxed to allow pathologists and laboratory professionals emergency authorization to review and interpret digital slides of pathology specimens. As of March 26, 2020, 10,000 letters to federal policymakers had been sent via the ASCP e-Advocacy Center. **A policy victory was secured (March 26, 2020) allowing pathologists to perform remote reads – as the CMS issued a memo with guidance for CLIA certified laboratories.**
* ASCP was instrumental in securing the support of the American Medical Association in our efforts to support the relaxation of regulations related to digital pathology. Within hours of ASCP’s request to high-level AMA staff to add this issue to the AMA prioritization list, AMA acknowledged to ASCP that this had been added to the AMA’s priorities. The AMA then outlined this as one of their priorities to the Trump Administration. ASCP alerted the Chair of the AMA Pathology Section Council along with ASCP’s members of the AMA Pathology Section Council.
* ASCP has also communicated with the CMS CLIA Partners Group (March 17, 2020) to alert them to the potential for testing personnel shortages and the possible need for flexibility to ensure labs can secure sufficient numbers of testing professionals to keep testing operations open.
* The ASCP Board of Certification wrote to PearsonVue, our testing vendor, to urge them to re-open certification testing operations to laboratory personnel. PearsonVue is only testing individuals it has classified as Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers, and only in major metropolitan markets.
* ASCP & NSH wrote CMS (March 9, 2020) seeking the Department’s regulatory clarification of the personnel training requirements for histotechnology professionals, specific to the issue of grossing. In light of the UPenn hospital situation in which a lab’s grossing operations were shut down because a pathologists’ assistant contracted the SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 virus, this effort provides labs more flexibility to ensure its pathology grossing operations can continue as staff contract COVID-19.

**Ensuring Financial Stability of Pathologists and Commercial Labs**

* ASCP wrote to congressional leadership (March 21, 2020) to encourage Congress, as part of the third supplemental COVID-19 response bill, to include $5 billion in funding to ensure that hospital, reference, and academic medical center laboratories are able to secure funding to support and possibly expand their testing operations to meet the testing challenges for COVID-19. With elective medical procedures being discouraged, laboratories are likely to see a significant shift in the volume and type of laboratory testing they usually do.
* ASCP co-signed a letter drafted by the AMA (March 24,2020) to urge Congress, as part of the final “stimulus” legislation provisions, to help physicians sustain their practices and provide their patients with the best possible care during the COVID-19 emergency. Due to ASCP’s advocacy with AMA that helped raise laboratory capacity to a top-tier AMA issue, their letter included specific provisions recognizing the need for “dedicated and direct financial support to physicians and their practices on the front lines of testing, diagnosing, and treating patients.”

**Providing Resource Support for Our Members**

* ASCP has been posting useful resources to assist laboratories during this public health crisis and supporting the dissemination of information and advocacy materials to the laboratory community via ASCP’s resource page ([www.ascp.org/COVID-19](file:///\\ascpilchvm167\home\juliannew\2020%20Files\Coronavirus\www.ascp.org\COVID-19)). A Special Edition of ASCP’s e-Policy newsletter was sent out (March 27, 2020) alerting members to the Administration’s decision to allow remote pathology and to alert them to the laboratory medicine provisions of the CARES Act.

**Supporting a Global Response to COVID-19**

* ASCP sent a letter to CDC Director Robert Redfield urging that resources be made available through PEPFAR to continue to strengthen the laboratory infrastructure in resource-poor countries served by the PEPFAR program. ASCP offered our assistance in this effort. The CARES Act provides an additional $500 million dollars in funds related to Global Health Security.

**Ensuring ASCP and Other Health Related Organizations Can Respond to the Financial Crisis**

* ASCP wrote (March 6, 2020) the Trump Administration’s lead economist, Larry Kudlow, to urge the Administration to allow tax-exempt non-profit medical associations to be included in its aid package for industries impacted by the COVID-19.
* ASCP signed a letter (April 2, 2020) spearheaded by ASAE to express concern that the CARES Act may not allow all associations to access funds in the Emergency Injury Disaster Loan Program section of the CARES Act.

**Joining Partner Organizations in Responding to the Pandemic**

* ASCP co-signed (March 30, 2020) a letter to Congressional leaders put together by the American Society for Microbiology calling for a comprehensive, science-based and nonpartisan review of the COVID-19 response once the immediate public health emergency has passed. The letter recommended the review take place by either a federal commission or the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine.

* The Cytotechnology Program Review Committee (Committee on Accreditation) issued a COVID-19 Statement indicating that scheduled visits have been put on hold and that they will work with programs to help them navigate issues that impact students. ASCP is a Sponsoring Society of CAAHEP.
* As a member of the Council of Medical Specialty Societies, ASCP signed a letter (March 27, 2020) to President Trump supporting societal travel and gathering restrictions to slow the transmission of the virus. The letter urged the Administration to develop a strong nationwide plan. The letter was signed by 44 U.S.-based medical specialty societies. ASCP also signed a CMSS letter (April 1, 2020) expressing concern about the lack of PPE for health care workers and urging the rejection of efforts to gag, reprimand or retaliate against front-line health professionals who publicly report PPE shortages.