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March 18, 2021

President Joseph Biden
Vice President Kamala Harris
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President and Madame Vice President:

On behalf of the American Academy of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (AAPM&R), I am writing to call your attention to the needs of 3 to 10 million Americans who are or will likely experience symptoms of Post-Acute Sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC) and to urge you to prepare and implement a comprehensive national crisis plan to address the needs of patients with PASC. AAPM&R is grateful for the work you, your administration, and Congressional colleagues have achieved in the recently passed American Rescue Plan. Additionally, we appreciate your transparency in the National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness and your investment in imperative COVID-19 research. At this time, we have an opportunity to take steps to avert the next crisis of the pandemic with PASC.

AAPM&R is the national medical specialty organization representing more than 10,000 physicians who are specialists in physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R). PM&R physicians, also known as physiatrists, are medical experts in treating a wide variety of conditions affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles, and tendons. PM&R physicians evaluate and treat injuries, illnesses, and disabilities, and are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans. Physiatrists utilize cutting-edge as well as time-tested treatments to maximize function and quality of life. Due to their training and expertise, PM&R physicians are uniquely qualified to help guide the multidisciplinary planning effort needed to address the rehabilitation and care needs of this rapidly growing patient population.

PASC, also known as Long COVID, is currently estimated to affect approximately 10-30% of individuals who had COVID-19.^{1,2} Of note, a recent publication of one of the first studies on PASC found that approximately a third of the patients suffering PASC were initially asymptomatic.³ Symptoms of

¹ Rubin R. As Their Numbers Grow, COVID-19 “Long Haulers” Stump Experts. JAMA. 2020;324(14):1381–1383. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.17709

² Logue JK, et al "Sequelae in Adults at 6 Months After COVID-19 Infection" JAMA Netw Open 2021; DOI: 0.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.0830.

³ Huang, Y; Pinto, MD; Borelli, JL; Mehrabadi, MA; Abrihim, H; Dutt, N; Lambert, N; Nurmi, EL; Chakraborty, R; Rahmani, AM; Downs, CA. “COVID Symptoms, Symptom

PASC are varied and ongoing, including neurological challenges, cognitive problems such as brain fog, shortness of breath, fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, and mobility issues. We must act now to form and implement a national crisis management plan that will help Americans impacted by PASC not only survive COVID-19 but regain their quality of life and return to being active members of their communities. Your administration has pointed out that recovery from COVID-19 is necessary to achieve economic stability. To that end, the nation needs a comprehensive national plan and commitment to work with local health systems to ensure everyone affected by COVID-19 has access to comprehensive medical care that will optimize their health and function.

AAPM&R believes the crisis plan must include commitment to three major components:

- resources to build necessary infrastructure,
- equitable access to care for all patients, and
- continued funding for research that advances medical understanding of PASC.

Currently, rehabilitation care in the United States lacks the infrastructure and funding to meet this crisis. Local health systems need resources for the necessary facilities and supplies to support patients and provide expert care. Additionally, this care must be supported through appropriate reimbursement to ensure clinicians are able to provide care to PASC patients consistently. All patients need timely and local access to multidisciplinary care to ensure that broad and varied symptoms are addressed. Relatedly, it is imperative this plan address inequities in our health care system that result in diminished and limited access to sustainable quality care because of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic factors and disability status. Patients who do not recover quickly need access to strengthened safety-net care, including disability evaluation and benefits, which will likely need to be addressed by the Social Security Administration (and others).

AAPM&R applauds you and members of Congress for approving research funding and the current efforts of the National Institutes of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as rejoining the World Health Organization, to advance our understanding of PASC. As research is conducted, results are needed in real-time to support providers in rapidly developing best practices for PASC care.

Finally, I offer AAPM&R as a resource to your administration to help prepare and implement this national crisis management plan. AAPM&R is leading a

multidisciplinary PASC collaborative with current nationwide PASC clinics to foster an ongoing, patient-centered, clinical exchange for treating and learning more about all long-term issues resulting from COVID-19. We anticipate the collaborative will produce guidance on how current clinics are structured and for optimizing symptom assessment and treatment plans based on the latest scientific evidence. We will continue to follow up with your administration to share our discoveries and recommendations based on these efforts.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to these important issues, and for your consideration of these comments. For more information, please contact Reva Singh, Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs at AAPM&R, at rsingh@aapmr.org or 847.737.6030.

Sincerely,



Stuart M. Weinstein, MD
President, AAPM&R

CC:

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader

The Honorable Dick Durbin
Senate Majority Whip

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
House Majority Leader

The Honorable John Thune
Senate Republican Whip

The Honorable Steve Scalise
House Republican Whip