



March 17, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Seema Verma
Administrator
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar and Administrator Verma:

I am writing on behalf of the National Partnership for Hospice Innovation (NPHI) to, first, thank you for your leadership during this extraordinarily challenging time for our country, for the Medicare beneficiaries and their families that we all serve every day, and for the providers of care for those facing serious and advanced illness, including the community-integrated not-for-profit hospice and advanced illness care providers that make up NPHI. Our 70+ members stand ready to assist you—please reach out if there is anything we can do to help you navigate this unprecedented emergency.

NPHI members are deeply embedded in our communities and we have decades of experience providing the highest-quality home-based care for people facing serious illness. We serve the most vulnerable patients where they live, regardless of their ability to pay. We serve patients who often have no other caregivers, and our members have a multitude of home-based primary care and palliative care programs that play an essential role in caring for those facing a critical illness.

We appreciate the President's leadership in exercising statutory authorities to declare a national emergency in response to the coronavirus. As you know, and have already taken action to implement, the declaration of a national emergency under the Stafford Act empowers the Secretary with waiver authority that will allow hospices and other Medicare providers to deploy resources flexibly to meet the most critical needs of all our patients first. We have read the first round of CMS guidance issued under Section 1135 that was released on March 13, and we stand ready to work with you and your staff to develop further guidance specifically for Medicare hospice providers.

Concerning current audits and other enforcement activity, we respectfully ask that you consider a temporary moratorium on these activities until the time that the current emergency has passed. This would allow our members to devote all of their resources solely to meeting the needs of their patients while allowing oversight work to proceed in due course.

Concerning future enforcement of regulatory requirements, NPHI respectfully requests that CMS, its contractors, and surveyors exercise discretion in enforcing the Medicare Hospice Conditions of Participation (CoPs) and other program requirements for services provided during this time of national emergency. We are all focused on doing what is best for our patients, their families, and our program staff and volunteers during this extraordinarily difficult time. We appreciate CMS's leadership, guidance, and discretion in future reviews and surveys of hospice providers during this period of time.

Thank you again for your tireless work on behalf of the nation, and please reach out to me if NPHI may be of service to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Tom Koutsoumpas'.

Tom Koutsoumpas
President and CEO

*A partnership of non-profit, hospice, palliative,
and advanced illness care providers.*