

To all physicians and health care providers across the Commonwealth:

These are exceptional times. COVID-19 is a risk to the lives and well-being of nearly every American. Even if individuals and their loved ones avoid this virus, the ripple effects across our nation and our Commonwealth will be immeasurable. The Medical Society of Virginia (MSV) understands the immensity of the challenge before Virginia and all health care professionals. Any successful effort to stop COVID-19 will require coordinated sacrifice and a deep community response.

The MSV serves as the voice of Virginia's physicians, residents, medical students, physician assistants and physician assistant students, representing all medical specialties in all regions of the Commonwealth. Our membership is at the frontlines of responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

In order to lead the response to COVID-19, protect patients, and make best use of health providers' training and expertise, the MSV recommends all physicians and providers follow the American College of Surgeons guidelines, CMS guidelines, and specialty society recommendations postponing elective procedures. Given the risk of COVID-19, there are several reasons elective procedures should be postponed:

1. As stated by AMA President Patrice A. Harris, M.D., M.A., "there is nowhere near enough PPE in the fight against COVID-19—a shortage that endangers patients and jeopardizes the entire response to this virus." Elective procedures that use PPE and other resources potentially jeopardize our national response to COVID-19.
2. COVID-19 is spread through aerosolized droplets that are expelled during coughing, sneezing, or breathing. Performing elective procedures puts patients and providers in a position for infection by bringing them into the hospital and exposing them to multiple potential transfers. This violates the edict of social distancing. We need as many physicians, nurses and other health care workers as possible responding to this crisis—not endangering themselves for nonessential work.
3. Accountability does not lessen during a crisis, it only heightens. Physicians live under a staff privileging regulatory framework that already accounts for unethical behavior and incorporates the individual needs of each region.
4. Cancelling elective procedures is an ethical responsibility. This not an administrative decision, but a medical decision. The entire national health care community is asking people to stay home, miss work, and do what they can to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Physicians owe it to our communities to make similar decisions. Under the current threat, performance of inappropriate procedures is unethical.

It is up to each physician to make the best recommendation for their patient given the risks, benefits, and alternatives. The MSV will update its recommendation as new information develops. The MSV is committed to providing our members and the broader health community with the most up to date COVID-19 information. Please visit MSV.org/COVID19 to get the latest information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C Deal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Clifford L. Deal III, MD, FACS
President