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President and CEO
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May 19, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Azar:

Thank you for your continued leadership in managing the many issues related to the coronavirus pandemic. The attention you and the many agencies under your jurisdiction have provided to all the details related to the public health emergency response continues to show positive and important results.

Of the many critical issues related to the pandemic, those that have become ever more important are the efforts to track down cases with symptoms, identify clusters, including tracing the people they have been in contact with, and establishing a quarantine system until such time as the individual is no longer infectious. All this is accomplished through a robust system of testing.

To support the overall federal response, you led an unprecedented effort to waive hundreds of federal rules. All states moved in the same manner. And many of the health insurers across the country acted quickly to modify their policies in areas such as testing, prior authorization and telehealth services to align with federal and state policies, thus giving both health care providers and patients a new set of tools to combat the virus.

Since your public health emergency declaration on Jan. 31, we have been relying on these waivers to both treat patients and aggressively build capacity. We are beginning to shift to the important work of mitigation. During this transition, there will be adjustments to federal, state and individual insurance company decisions on whether to extend, modify or halt waivers or coverage. One decision that should be universal in all these changes is the continuance of coverage for COVID-19 testing.

The battle against the coronavirus will continue until the general population has immunity and a vaccine is found and fully deployed. Your announcement last Friday of "Operation Warp Speed" is a testament to the importance in the effort to develop and deploy a vaccine.

Testing is the linchpin that will permit all of us to live and conduct business in this new environment. Testing will permit ongoing monitoring and identification of cases, better movement toward treatment and isolation to prevent spread. Testing also helps in the identification of anyone who encountered those who are infected, permitting their rapid movement to treatment as well. Finally, testing supports the larger public health picture, helping us understand the prevalence, spread and contagious nature of the disease.

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COVID-19 testing should become a benefit like the many other wellness benefits that are offered to insured individuals across the country. Over the past decade, the efforts to target prevention and promote healthy behavioral changes, such as health screenings, expanded immunizations and testing for diabetes and other chronic diseases, have led to reductions in medical costs and absenteeism from work. Those benefits should be the same if not greater for COVID-19 testing for all individuals, particularly if testing is permitted to continue for those who are asymptomatic, those who have had potential exposure, pre-surgical evaluations and evaluations for return to work.

The three key components for the success of the “Opening Up America Again” plan include support for state and local officials to reopen their economies, helping people get back to work and the ongoing protection of American lives. A myriad of actions went into each of these goals with the key being to contain and reduce the spread of the virus through testing. If we cannot do that, the unselfish sacrifice of many individuals and businesses will have been lost. In this regard, we look forward to working with you, insurance companies and others to help design testing policies that will permit all of us to both live and thrive until a vaccine is found.

Thank you again for the leadership you and so many others have provided during this public health emergency.

Sincerely,



Herb B. Kuhn
President and CEO

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