



New York Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy

January 4, 2021

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
Members of the NYS Vaccine Distribution and Implementation Task Force
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

We applaud the efforts of the State and your leadership in getting us to the point where COVID-19 vaccination is a reality. We were last in communication with your office in May regarding resumption of elective procedures in ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs). While we in hospital settings have had the good fortune to keep our doors open since the suspension was lifted, we are now coming to you with concerns surrounding access to the vaccine for physicians and their staff in non-hospital affiliated ambulatory/office settings.

The New York Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (NYSGE) represents more than 1,000 gastroenterologists and physicians-in-training in New York State, but this matter affects not only specialists but also independent physician practices of all types across the region. While vaccination is well underway for hospital-based practitioners, which include the majority of our Society's Governing Council, many physicians in NYS (and their staff) who would qualify as being part of phase 1A are not being included in hospital-based programs and are anxiously left without guidance.

Our members have reached out with little success to the NY DOH, the NYC DOHMH, and to both United State Senators Schumer and Gillibrand. One of our physician members was directed to the CIR (CityWide Immunization Registry) to register as a vaccination provider and was advised that was the only pathway to vaccinate themselves and their staff. Notwithstanding refrigeration availability and its cost, many specialists have never administered vaccines to patients let alone themselves or their staff. The CIR registration process is tedious, is not intuitive, and we are hearing that the office is overwhelmed and is not providing the necessary facility codes to new practices.

While not the intent, it appears the State has inadvertently forgotten the many hundreds, likely thousands, of health care workers that work in small practices. We acknowledge that ICU, ED and inpatient staff in general need prioritization, but outpatient providers also need access to vaccines. Both New Jersey and Connecticut have plans to vaccinate the staff of private medical practices. New Jersey is opening 'mega sites' and allowing health care workers who do not have access to vaccines from hospitals or their employers to be vaccinated before distribution to non-medical essential workers. Connecticut is allowing private medical practices to register themselves and their employees with the DOH to be vaccinated by hospital and pharmacies. New York needs a similar plan, and that plan needs to be widely and loudly broadcast.

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We are almost at the finish line, and we are all crossing it together. Please direct resources and clarity to this process for a critical subset of healthcare providers.

In good health and to a much happier New Year,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "ASethi".

Amrita Sethi, MD, MSc

President

New York Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy