

April 24, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

The Honorable Carl Heastie
New York State Assembly Speaker
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12248

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
New York State Senate Majority Leader
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Governor Cuomo, Assembly Speaker Heastie, and Senate Majority Leader Stewart Cousins:

We find ourselves in the midst of the greatest health care crisis of more than a century, the ramifications of which will reverberate for years, if not decades, to come. We write to respectfully urge action to expand and make permanent pharmacists' ability to provide all recommended vaccines to adults in New York State.

Governor Andrew Cuomo has referred to society arriving at a "new normal". This is a very apt term, perhaps no more so than for the delivery of health care services. Former roles and methods of delivery of essential services must be reviewed and updated to respond to that new normal.

New Yorkers are used to seeing vaccinations for adults for flu, pneumonia, whooping cough and shingles being available in pharmacies and administered by pharmacists. Pharmacists have become an integral part of our healthcare system's efforts to achieve high rates of coverage of these vaccines in the recommended age groups. However, there are large gaps regarding which immunizations New York's residents can access from their pharmacists.

Governor Cuomo had smartly included a provision in his proposed budget to expand pharmacists' authority to administer all immunizations recommended for adults by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This would have allowed pharmacists to provide vaccines for human papilloma virus (the cause of cervical cancer), hepatitis A and B, measles, mumps and rubella. Importantly, it would also allow pharmacists to quickly become an access point if and when a vaccine for COVID-19 becomes available. Unfortunately, the state legislature did not adopt this provision in the final state budget.

In addition to the Governor's actions, the Legislature has introduced bills that accomplish the same goal. The bills (S.5227 by Senator May and A.6511-A by Assemblywoman Paulin) have broad support in both houses. We strongly recommend that they be passed this year as part of a strong response to the COVID-19 crisis, since there is general agreement that a vaccine will be necessary to truly end the COVID-19 threat. When the vaccine is developed and approved, having this provision in statute will allow for the immediate action by pharmacists to play a critical role of getting as many people vaccinated as soon as possible.

Pharmacists have been successfully providing vaccinations in New York for more than a decade. They receive education about vaccines as part of their training to become pharmacists. Those who vaccinate in New York must

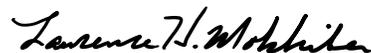
also be certified as immunizers by the State Education Department. To provide immunizations, pharmacists must have a standing order, patient-specific or non-patient-specific, from a licensed physician or nurse practitioner. Pharmacists help ensure that the patient's primary care physician receives notification that the vaccination was given and, with the patient's consent, report the immunization to the applicable immunization registry. If a patient does not have a primary care physician, pharmacists counsel them on the importance of having one and provide a list for their area. Clearly, the public appreciates the easy access for important immunizations they receive from their pharmacists; since gaining the right to vaccinate in 2008, over 2 million vaccinations are provided to adults each year by pharmacists in New York according to the State Health Department.

Expanding access to critical immunizations is essential for keeping New Yorkers safe. Additionally, there are potential cost savings to the overall health care system from a reduction of emergency room or healthcare provider office visits due to avoidable illnesses.

Administering immunizations is not a competition between health professionals. Rather, it is a collaborative mission among physicians, nurses, healthcare clinics and systems, public health agencies, health insurers and pharmacists to help us achieve greater health protections for all residents of New York. Our "new normal" must incorporate more such "team approaches" to health care.

At this time of great stress on the healthcare system due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to have all components of the system able to provide life-saving vaccines. We strongly urge the Legislature and the Executive to pass S.5227/ A.6511-A this session to proactively address this public health imperative.

Sincerely,



Lawrence H. Mokhiber, B.S., M.S., RPh
Former Executive Secretary
New York State Board of Pharmacy



Guthrie Birkhead, MD, MPH
Professor Emeritus, University at Albany School of Public Health
Board member, New York State Public Health Association
Former Chair, National Vaccine Advisory Committee

cc : Dr. Howard Zucker, Commissioner, NYSDOH
The Honorable Deborah Glick
The Honorable Toby Ann Stavisky
The Honorable Rachel May
The Honorable Amy Paulin
The Honorable Gustavo Rivera
The Honorable Richard Gottfried
Mr. Brad Hutton, NYSDOH