

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

September 20, 2020

“Covid-19 Has Changed Medical Practices”

The effects of COVID-19 extend far beyond our physical wellbeing, are altering medicine overall and some of these changes will stay long after the crisis is over. The best hope anyone has to survive and thrive in a post-COVID world is to brace for “the new normal,” whatever that may be. And it may be a far cry from the old normal. There’s no telling how much—or little—this pandemic will affect hospitals, clinics, and physicians in the long term. But the evidence that some effects will become permanent is compelling. Physicians will operate in a healthcare system altered by financial ruin, technology, and other evolutions spurred by the pandemic. Here are four changes that experts believe will occur. 1) **Clinics and Hospitals Close.** The American Hospital Association estimates that COVID-19 has collectively cost US hospitals more than \$50 billion per month since March. By mid-August, at least 18 US hospitals had closed this year. COVID-19 has placed more pressure on all healthcare organizations, from hospitals to independent primary care clinics. The pandemic and its restrictions on elective procedures and outpatient visits have resulted in a “dramatic” drop in hospital revenues. 2) **The Medical Supply Chain Changes.** Social media posts, physicians and clinicians excoriated governments, vendors, and healthcare organizations for shortages of personal protective equipment, ventilators, and even pharmaceuticals. Now and after COVID-19, hospitals and medical practices must build strong bonds with local manufacturers and distributors, while adapting to new standards of care. Experts claim that COVID-19 exposed weaknesses in the hospital supply chain. They’ll need to create redundancy programs designed to share resources among hospitals and move supplies across the country as needed. 3) **Telemedicine Goes Mainstream.** When the feds relaxed telemedicine reimbursement rules in response to the pandemic, the use of virtual care soared. COVID-19 has inspired healthcare organizations to adopt and implement high-tech telehealth systems at scale. In other words, telemedicine is here to stay. Telemedicine serves patients through expanded access and more affordable care. 4) **New Protocols Remain in the Clinic.** Hospitals and clinics will cement COVID-era operations, visitor, and design protocols well after the pandemic. Health systems and technology vendors are preparing for a future in which the waiting room is virtual, much like during the pandemic, instead of physical. The CDC has [advised](#) medical practices to “make long-term changes to practices and procedures,” including no longer using porous materials for seating, leaving doors open, and upgrading ventilation systems. Some hospitals have already decided to implement training to enable clinicians from one department to work in another.

In the America that I love, the pandemic’s footprint on healthcare is proving damaging to doctors and entire communities. It is important to prepare for what’s next.

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