April 1, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
Office of the Vice President  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Shortages of Critical Medications for COVID-19 Patient Care

Dear Vice President Pence:

On behalf of our more than 55,000 pharmacists, pharmacy students, and pharmacy technicians practicing on the front lines of COVID-19 response, we urge the Administration to take urgent action to address shortages of supportive medications critical to ventilating and treating coronavirus patients.

ASHP greatly appreciates the efforts of the Taskforce and this Administration to assist hospitals in obtaining the personal protective equipment and ventilators necessary to keep patients alive. However, these ventilators will be rendered useless without an adequate supply of the medications – including opioids (e.g., fentanyl, morphine, hydromorphone), sedatives (e.g., midazolam, propofol), and paralytics (e.g., pancuronium, rocuronium, succinylcholine) – that must be administered concomitantly with mechanical ventilation in critically ill patients, including those with COVID-19, to ensure the successful use of this life-saving supportive care. It is imperative that manufacturing of these medications be increased immediately and available supply be allocated based on current projections of critical care patient volume, rather than based on historical allocations, which do not reflect current need.

Use of these essential medications has spiked as COVID-19 patient surge builds, and demand is outpacing supply and exhausting current allocations. Supplies freed up by the cessation of elective surgeries are not sufficient to match the intense critical illness of COVID-19 patients. In some cases, hospitals are scrambling to replenish dwindling stock with only hours before they run out completely. This need will grow exponentially over the next few weeks as case numbers climb nationally.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, ASHP has been reaching out to federal agencies and Congress in an effort to protect our critical drug supply. Most recently, we, along with the American Hospital Association, the American Medical Association, and others, sent the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) a letter requesting that they immediately increase allocation of annual production quota for supportive opioids to manufacturers and 503B outsourcing facilities. We have also been working closely with the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) to mitigate potential and ongoing shortages (fentanyl, morphine, and hydromorphone have been on FDA’s shortage list for months) and to request additional regulatory flexibilities for hospitals and 503B outsourcing facilities to compound essential medications, which have not yet been granted. Additionally, we are aware that the Department of Health & Human Services released a request for information regarding manufacturing capacity.
for critical drugs, but we were dismayed to see that the medications necessary for ventilating patients were
designated Tier 2. Failure to treat these drugs as anything other than absolutely essential will render ventilators
worthless and exact a heavy patient toll. (An appendix has been attached detailing drugs that are needed to
treating these critical care patients.)

We respectfully request that you direct the agencies to coordinate their efforts to increase manufacturing
capacity to the greatest extent possible for the duration of the national emergency to ensure that available
supply is allocated based on volume of critical care patients. ASHP and its members will assist in any way
possible. Please do not hesitate to let us know if we can provide additional information or data to aid the
Administration in its efforts to defeat COVID-19.

Sincerely,

Paul W. Abramowitz