



REQUEST FOR DME STAFF BE INCLUDED IN COVID-19 FRONTLINE WORKER PAY

August 10, 2021

To the Front-Line Worker Pay Working Group,

The Midwest Association for Medical Equipment Services and Supplies (MAMES) is an eight state regional association of durable medical equipment and supplies (DME) providers in MN and 7 other Midwest states. Our members supply home oxygen therapy, ventilator services, complex rehabilitation technology (CRT) and many other medically necessary DME items and services.

DME providers have been on the frontlines fighting the COVID-19 pandemic keeping patients safe in the community and out of long-term care and hospitals. The pandemic has reestablished how important it is to treat people at home rather than in the hospital whenever possible so that hospitals have capacity to be able to treat the most critically ill.

MAMES requests that the Front-Line Worker Pay Working Group consider the following DME staff as COVID-19 frontline essential workers due to their increased financial burdens and increased risk of virus exposure because of the nature of their work. These front-line workers have worked tirelessly since the beginning of the pandemic to ensure those that who need them the most received our essential services.

Respiratory Therapy (RT) staff that visit patients in the home:

- Currently, DME respiratory providers utilize Respiratory Therapists (RTs) to provide in-home services to patients who have been prescribed oxygen equipment, home mechanical ventilation therapy, tracheostomy care, positive airway pressure (PAP) therapy, and other related respiratory equipment, supplies and services.
- RTs are face-to-face with COVID-19 positive patients and their families, educating them on the respiratory equipment that is necessary to keep them safely at home.
- There is no added reimbursement for RTs for the DME respiratory providers who have them on staff.

Service Delivery Technicians

- Service Technicians are in hospitals delivering portable oxygen equipment for COVID-19 positive patients so they can be discharged to prevent overpopulation in the hospitals.
- They are in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and private residences setting up hospital beds, stationary oxygen and wheelchairs.
- They average around 10 stops per day that continues to put them at high risk probability of being infected.
- They are on-call 24/7 days a week. If a hospital determines someone is not sick enough to be admitted, the service technician delivers necessary equipment to the patient's home and provides education that can take up to 1 hour depending on the difficulty of the equipment/patient understanding.
- They pick up the equipment after COVID-19 patient use.

Customer Service staff with direct contact with patients coming into provider locations:

- Many DME providers have retail operations so that people can come into a store to pick up their prescribed home medical equipment and supplies. Providers kept their retail operations open so that DME products and services could be accessed by patients and families.
- The DME retail environment is not a controlled environment and the staff had to assist patients even though they screened the patients, some of them were not truthful about their symptoms or diagnosis status.
- An additional step for the retail team is to assure patients and their families entering our buildings are adhering to Covid standards.

DME/Complex Rehabilitation Technology (CRT) who have Assistive Technology Professional (ATP) staff:

- DME/CRT providers employ Assistive Technology Professionals (ATP) who work directly with patients to provide essential equipment and services such as in-person evaluations for custom seating systems and individually-configured power and manual wheelchairs for high-risk individuals. Additionally, ATP provide required service and repair to these items. The hands-on nature of evaluating, delivering, and adjusting many of these products in close proximity to patients subjects ATP to considerable increased risk for exposure to infected or recovering individuals.
- ATP are also in patient residences and healthcare/group home settings every day and play a central role in helping individuals manage their health care needs at home so that hospitals and acute care facilities have the capacity to handle those requiring more intensive care. In addition to directly interfacing with patients, most products and services provided require them to enter homes to set up the equipment with other caregivers or family present. The need to maintain these services resulted in increased costs for personal protective equipment (PPE) being taken on by DME/CRT providers.

Thank you for your attention to this request and please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Respectfully,



Rose Schafhauser
MAMES Executive Director