Colleagues –

In our transition to virtual care, going through the same steps we would in the exam room will ensure that we continue to provide the highest level of ethical, evidence-based patient care. Key among these steps is doing an appropriate clinical assessment and documenting the clinical reason for every prescription we write or refill.

As clinicians, we’re conditioned to help patients and ease their suffering, yet unnecessary prescribing may do more harm than good. With resources potentially strained and supply chains uncertain, adhering to rigorous prescribing standards is more important than ever.

We’re seeing more patients requesting prescription medications “just in case”—refilling medications they aren’t currently taking, requesting early refills to stockpile medications they are taking, or asking for new prescriptions that aren’t medically necessary.

- Recent news stories about medications to treat COVID-19 are already contributing to potential shortages. Our supply of hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil) is now at risk of depletion. Prescribing hydroxychloroquine to patients who request it for COVID-19 prevention is not only unsupported by evidence, it also makes the drug less available to patients taking it to manage other conditions. We are now restricting hydroxychloroquine refills to a 14-day supply for rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and malaria, and up to a 7-day supply for members hospitalized with COVID-19.

- The increased isolation, stress, and anxiety many patients are experiencing during this outbreak may cause their pain, depression, insomnia, or substance use disorders to flare. History tells us that when patients with chronic mental health conditions have limited access to care, there is a tendency to think of medications instead of the full range of treatment options. For patients with many of these conditions, mental health support is available via phone, chat, and video.

- As a reminder, clinicians should not prescribe for themselves or for family and friends.

For guidance on these and other clinical questions that arise during this outbreak, a COVID-19 Clinical Information site will be available soon.

We ask that you continue to ensure appropriate prescribing as we continue to meet our patients’ ongoing medical needs. We appreciate your ongoing stewardship of these important resources.

Thank you for all you do, every day, to care for our patients, especially during these uncharted times.