

January 29, 2021

David Kessler, MD, JD
Chief Science Officer of COVID Response
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Dr. Kessler:

On behalf of the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) and its 52,000 members, I am writing to offer the support and expertise of ENA and its members as you take the reins of the vaccine development, production and distribution program that has been plagued by delays and uncertainty. We look forward to working with you and the rest of the administration to ensure this unprecedented undertaking of vaccinating the nation is done in an orderly and efficient manner.

As you know, nurses are a critical part of any effective response to a major public health crisis. COVID-19 is no different. Nurses, including emergency nurses, have been on the front lines of the pandemic since day one, performing critical triage, testing and bedside care functions for their patients. The first and last person a patient encounters at the hospital is usually a nurse. They are the health care professionals who have the most contact with COVID-19 patients.

Based on the expertise of ENA regarding the coronavirus response, as well as the ongoing role of emergency nurses in vaccinating people throughout the country, we recommend the following actions to enhance our nation's COVID-19 vaccination efforts:

Improved Federal Coordination

Emergency nurses have witnessed first-hand the detrimental impact of a slower-than-expected vaccination effort. As such, we applaud the measures provided in President Biden's recent Executive Order (Mobilizing the United States Government to Provide a Unified and Effective Response to Combat COVID-19 and to Provide United States Leadership on Global Health and Security) to centralize authority by creating the position of Coordinator of the COVID-19 Response. This person will oversee the production and distribution of not only vaccines, but of other critical medical supplies such as personal protective equipment and testing supplies.

We urge you to vest sufficient authority in this new position to overcome unnecessary delays in distributing vaccines to states and other jurisdictions. Further, a process must be put in place to quickly address questions about vaccines and overcome bureaucratic impediments to their swift distribution.

Full Utilization of the Defense Production Act

It is our view that the Defense Production Act can assist in increasing COVID-19 vaccine production. Consequently, we support President Biden's Executive Order fully invoking and plans to utilize the authority under the DPA. The law can be used to strengthen the supply chain for needed raw materials and support expanding capacity for the complex components of the coronavirus vaccines.

In the short term, the DPA can help ensure that manufacturing plants have enough raw materials to manufacture. Further, the DPA can be utilized to spur the construction of new plants or the re-tooling of existing ones for the purpose to assure the United States has the supply of vaccines it needs for years to come.

Provide Support and Guidance to States and Key Stakeholders

An effort of this complexity requires close coordination with the relevant state health care officials and other critical stakeholders. It further requires prompt decision-making based on best practices and science. To meet the President's goal of delivering 100 million doses of vaccine in the first 100 days of his Administration requires that tasks be standardized and effectively communicated. Otherwise, unnecessary confusion will inhibit the vaccine distribution and delivery operation. In short, accomplishing the vaccination goal will require consistent communication and close coordination with all key stakeholders, including our nation's 180,000 emergency nurses that stand willing and able to assist in this campaign.

Remove Barriers Preventing Nurses from Providing Vaccinations

A greatly expanded workforce is needed to expeditiously deliver the vaccine to the approximately 260 million Americans currently eligible for vaccination. As such, we support the steps outlined in President Biden's COVID-19 response plan to expand the health care workforce to meet this challenge. Specifically, we support the recent amendment to the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act that authorizes licensed nurses to administer vaccines in any state and allows retired nurses who have inactive state licenses to participate in vaccine administration. Additionally, ENA encourages partnerships with nurse education programs to allow nursing students to vaccinate patients provided they are working under the supervision of licensed health care professionals and have been taught COVID-19 vaccination protocols. While many of these barriers are often found at the state level, we would appreciate any support you could provide to enable as many trained nurses and nursing students as possible to participate in this effort.

We appreciate your leadership during these challenging times and the Emergency Nurses Association looks forward to working with you and providing assistance as you respond to this major public health emergency.

Sincerely,



Ron Kraus, MSN, RN, EMT, CEN, ACNS-BC, TCRN
2021 President