



Leading Through **COVID-19**

GRATEFUL ENGAGEMENT IN THE MIDST OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS: **Working with Physicians and Clinicians**

Now more than ever, there is a need for grateful engagement in hospitals. A month ago, this meant a strong working partnership with key physicians and clinicians, emphasizing the science and positive impact of expressed gratitude on patients. However, during this unprecedented time, health care delivery has been incalculably amended. The approach to grateful engagement must be modified as well to stay aligned with the changes in patient complexity, workforce demands, tightened infection control measures and the absence of patient family and friends.

Every hospital is different

COVID-19 is substantially exceeding the nation's capacity for ICU beds, ventilators and even human capital. There is, however, huge disparity among hospitals across the country—some already reaching capacity while others have not yet felt the surge that overwhelmingly affects their daily operations. The impact carries additional variability as hospitals limit elective surgeries

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and non-urgent cases, leaving some physicians functioning at maximum capacity while others face gravely reduced or eliminated caseloads. Hospital operations and health care workforce deployment varies greatly. Any attempt to engage patients, physicians or clinicians must reflect the uniqueness of each organization's reality and the capacity of the foundation.

Every strategy is different

For foundations that have an existing grateful engagement strategy, this could be the optimal time to continue existing physician partnerships. Also consider others not deployed to the frontline

who have been impacted by limited elective surgeries, aligning them with the philanthropic case and meeting the physician partner profile. Many are yearning to remain engaged with meaningful work. Approach each relationship separately, and remain sensitive to their personal and professional bandwidth and well-being. Maintain partnerships with physicians who are now serving on the frontline. Now is the time to overextend support and encouragement by adding value and connecting within the resources available.

For those seeking to build or advance a culture of grateful engagement, now is not the optimal time to engage frontline physicians and clinicians in the science of gratitude—the traditional backbone of gratitude initiatives. Now is the time to shower health care workers with an outpouring of gratitude.

Lean into the power of gratitude and lift up the caregivers

If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.
—BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

There was an urgent need within our hospitals to spread gratitude and compassion before COVID-19. The United States already faced a shortage of nurses and internal medicine physicians, with 40% of nurses and 50% of physicians experiencing symptoms of burnout.¹ This fragile workforce is now faced with treating exponential numbers of higher-risk, complex patients in non-optimal conditions.

Gratitude heals. Not only does the person expressing gratitude feel the positive impact but gratitude has also shown positive reciprocal impact to those providing care. Receiving gratitude has been shown to provide a protective factor for health care workforce.² A simple thank you in itself has shown to make a person happier. While gratitude will not solve this audacious predicament, gratitude can help. Imagine how an exhausted health care worker can be positively encouraged simply through a message of gratitude from a former patient. Your organization can help make these connections.

It is a huge opportunity to support

Overnight, there has been a shift in the grateful patient story's main character from the patient to the caregiver. The caregiver has become the hero, and, now more than ever, each employee in the hospital is a caregiver. This is the time to convey the power gratitude has and the eagerness for people to help.

A great opportunity to show gratitude is by honoring caregivers as the stories' heroes. Empower donors and friends of the health organization to extend messages of gratitude and encouragement to those at the epicenter. This simple act is therapeutic and authentically connects the sender, hospital, workforce and patients. Begin by personally calling current donors and further extend the offering to your constituent base and community. Message collection should be simple and include infection control constraints, such as inability to access clinical floors or accept mail delivery on units. Incorporate gratitude messages into communication prepared for the frontline through email distribution, during huddles and across social media platforms. Further connect and promote by placing signs at staff entrances, parking lots and around the hospital's exterior (meeting new regulations).

Gratitude is contagious. While this pandemic may have altered your strategy, there has never been a better time to elevate gratitude into your culture.

For a checklist on how to engage physicians and clinicians today, email the author Amy@AccordantHealth.com or visit the [Accordant website](#).

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¹<https://nam.edu/burnout-among-health-care-professionals-a-call-to-explore-and-address-this-underrecognized-threat-to-safe-high-quality-care/>

²http://www.healthdata.org/sites/default/files/files/research_articles/2020/covid_paper_MEDRXIV-2020-043752v1-Murray.pdf