

NYSNA 2020 Convention Resolutions

Resolution #1: The Critical Role of Nurses Ensuring New York is Prepared for a Resurgence of COVID-19

Submitted by the NYSNA Board of Directors

Whereas, NYSNA sounded the alarm to New York's public health officials and elected leaders about the potential risks of COVID-19 in January;

Whereas, New York state reported its first confirmed case of COVID-19 on March 1st and within weeks became the global epicenter of this pandemic;

Whereas, hospital administrators, along with state and federal officials, were completely unprepared for the arrival of COVID-19, and were unable to provide adequate protective equipment to the frontlines, secure essential medicines and equipment, coordinate logistics and the acquisition of critical supplies, or create the testing and contact tracing infrastructure necessary to suppress this virus;

Whereas, nurses and other frontline healthcare workers experienced critical shortages of PPE, were not equipped with the supplies or staff necessary to treat critically ill COVID-19 patients, and were frequently denied testing after known COVID-19 exposures;

Whereas, this lack of preparation has contributed to more than 6.5 million COVID-19 infections and over 190,000 fatalities nationwide, by far the worst track record of any industrialized country in the world;

Whereas, this lack of preparation also meant tens of thousands of frontline nurses and other essential workers in New York were unnecessarily exposed to this deadly virus, with many falling ill, and some even dying from COVID-19;

Whereas there is not yet a vaccine for COVID-19, and many experts are predicting a possible resurgence of the virus in New York this fall coinciding with flu season;

Whereas, it is paramount that the COVID-19 vaccine timeline be driven by rigorous scientific testing and public safety considerations, not politics;

Therefore, be it resolved that:

Nurses must have a seat at the table in our facilities as well as at the statewide level, so we can ensure New York is prepared for a resurgence of COVID-19 or another disaster.

The Centers for Disease Control and New York Department of Health must set infection control standards based on the latest science. Given the continued risk of airborne, droplet, and contact transmission nurses must help develop new COVID-19 standard precautions.

Every hospital in the state must adopt enhanced conventional capacity guidelines and build up its 90-day stockpile of PPE and necessary clinical equipment to meet these stronger standards. Hospitals must also begin the migration to reusable equipment, including fit-testing for all respirators.

We must ensure on-demand, rapid-result diagnostic testing for all frontline workers. Once accurate antibody tests are widely available, they may be useful for epidemiological purposes, but antibody tests cannot be used to send workers back to work, or worse, to ration their PPE. New York must also enhance its contact tracing program to effectively respond to a resurgence.

Healthcare workers, whether symptomatic or COVID-positive, must be provided the internationally recognized two-week quarantine or isolation period. We must also be able to access the paid sick time benefits available to all New Yorkers, and more if required.

New York must follow the example of the nearly two dozen states who have classified COVID-19 as an occupational disease for workers' compensation purposes. Frontline nurses and other essential workers cannot be denied critical benefits after working tirelessly on the frontlines during the first COVID-19 surge.

New York must fully fund major improvements to hospital plant and equipment to ensure we're prepared for a resurgence of COVID-19, including HVAC upgrades to improve ventilation, along with other engineering controls that are supposed to be our first line of defense against workplace hazards.

New York must take a central role in coordinating purchase and distribution of PPE, to ensure supplies are delivered where they are most needed, not to the hospital with the most resources. This is the only way to avoid a senseless bidding war for PPE and other critical supplies.

New York must enact a moratorium on hospital closings and mandate hospitals reactivate shuttered units so we have enough hospital beds and adequately trained staff for a resurgence of COVID-19.

Nurses and other healthcare workers have a right to know what risks they're facing when they report to work. Hospitals must be transparent with workers and the public, reporting essential information such as how many COVID-positive patients they are treating, levels of PPE inventory, ongoing plans for screening and cohorting, and the number of staff who've been exposed to or gotten sick from COVID-19.

The federal government must uphold a key principle of medical practice to 'do no harm' and use the best available science to guide vaccine development and distribution decisions. This is even more important in light of racist medical experimentation by the U.S. government, such as the notorious Tuskegee syphilis study, and speaks to the mistrust that many Americans have of governmental immunization efforts. If and when a safe and scientifically sound COVID-19 vaccine is available, NYSNA will encourage healthcare workers to vaccinate, but we will not support mandatory immunization as a condition of employment, and any future vaccine cannot substitute for proper infection control and personal protective equipment.