March 10, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC), a nonprofit, multidisciplinary organization whose mission is to create a safer world through the prevention of infection, encourages you to consider the future of infection prevention and control as you respond to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. Right now, only half of New York hospitals have certified infection preventionists leading efforts to prevent the spread of disease to their patients and healthcare personnel. While New York is currently taking many of the steps necessary to contain this outbreak, more can be done to prevent the spread of future infectious diseases. That is why we are encouraging you to incorporate A. 3705-B/S. 5186-B in your COVID-19 package. The measure would require new infection preventionists working in a hospital become certified within three years of hire.

APIC has six New York chapters representing nearly 750 infection preventionists. Infection preventionists are the healthcare staff responsible for establishing processes to reduce healthcare-associated infections (HAIs). They are the cornerstone of efforts to help prevent facilities from becoming epicenters for spreading disease. During outbreaks, they are training and re-educating staff on proper infection prevention protocols, making sure proper screening procedures are in place for patients entering a facility, and working to ensure supply chains are responsive to their facilities’ needs. When outbreaks are not making the news, infection preventionists are responsible for preparing their facilities for the inevitable by developing infection control policies, fit testing N-95 masks for healthcare personnel, and monitoring their hospitals for an increased presence of risky pathogens.

Infection preventionists come from a variety of healthcare backgrounds including nursing, public health, microbiology, and epidemiology. While each of these fields is important to healthcare and provides unique perspectives, they do not share a common specialized infection control curriculum, or the unique training necessary to lead a successful infection prevention and control program. Additionally, few post-secondary programs host a curriculum dedicated to the role of infection preventionist. Certification is the best way to fill this education gap. In order to be certified in infection control by the Certifying Board of Infection Control, infection preventionists must pass an exam and receive 40 units of continuing education in infection control every five years. This
program ensures hospitals will have staff with a demonstrated baseline of knowledge about infection prevention and that patients will be kept safe.

Facilities not adhering to proper infection prevention and control practices are at risk of becoming epicenters for outbreaks. A recent Journal of the American Medical Association article found that 41% of the first diagnosed COVID-19 patients in one hospital in Wuhan, China were presumed to be infected at that facility. Even when novel diseases are not dominating the airwaves, there are a wide variety of other pathogens in facilities infecting patients. According to the CDC, more than 687,000 patients acquire HAIs in hospitals each year. With many of these infections becoming resistant to the current arsenal of antibiotics. Research has shown that hospitals employing certified infection preventionists tend to have better patient outcomes and stronger adherence to certain infection prevention practices.

A. 3705-B/S. 5186-B recently passed the Assembly with little opposition and is now sitting idle in the Senate. While the legislation would require new infection preventionists in hospitals to become certified, it also provides flexibility for hospitals and infection control programs. The legislation provides time for new infection preventionists to learn their role prior to being tested. It also provides facilities with limited resources the ability to continue using the current labor pool and exempts them from this requirement if they cannot locate certified personnel.

While encouraging certification today cannot minimize the spread of the COVID-19, it will prepare hospitals for future epidemics. Patients and healthcare providers deserve facilities that are following the latest infection control practices. COVID-19 will not be the last infectious disease to enter America, however, we have an opportunity to make sure we are prepared for the next one.

Sincerely,

Connie Steed, MSN, RN, CIC, FAPIC
2020 APIC President

Enclosure [1]

cc: Sally Dreslin, Executive Deputy Commissioner at DOH
Howard Zucker, Executive Deputy Commissioner at DOH
Megan Baldwin, Assistant Secretary for Health, Executive Chamber

Spreading knowledge. Preventing infection.®