COVID-19 Planning for a Surge (Part II)
Provided by OFDA COVID-19 Consultant, Gary M. Burr, CFSP, Immed. Past President

We recently discussed planning for a potential surge in COVID-19 positive deaths by determining your storage capacity, working with colleagues in your area, the possible use of mobile cooling units from the Ohio Department of Health/ Ohio Emergency Management Agency and as a last resort, the possibility of using Attentive Care Sites for temporary storage of embalmed remains.

One of the major topics of discussions with the State Mass Fatality Planning Group has been the importance of limiting backlogs in the disposition process. OFDA continually advocates for Ohio physicians to be electronic signers in the EDRS system to improve efficiency and now to reduce exposure during the pandemic. The State strongly encourages, but Ohio law does not mandate physician enrollment. A unified message from ODH to the Ohio Medical Board and the Ohio Hospital Association is being drafted that promotes the critical need for enrollment.

OFDA members may also be able to have an impact by following the recommended steps:

1. Note the largest volume signers of death certificates for your funeral home. For those who do not sign electronically, ask to speak to the physician, medical group director or hospital administrator about converting physicians to an electronic signer. Be sure to highlight the ease of use, convenience of being able to sign from computer, laptop or phone and the safety concern of not exposing their patients and your staff by unnecessary trips to their office.

2. Speak to your county Coroner or another electronic signer to see if they would be willing to spearhead a campaign in your county to bring other physicians on board. Coroners have first-hand knowledge of the electronic signing system to share with other physicians.

3. Speak to your Health Commissioner to see if your local Health Department would be willing to work with you to get a campaign launched in your county. A letter from the Health Department may carry some extra weight with the physician.

Concentrating on the highest volume signers, i.e. hospice doctors, primary care physicians, oncologists, pulmonary physicians, cardiologists, etc. will be most beneficial to getting death certificates signed quicker.
Also, if you do not have a sub-registrar on staff, locate one in or around your community to issue disposition permits. Christmas and New Year’s Day both fall on Fridays this year. If your Health Department closes for the day or half day on the “eve”, that will be a four-day minimum getting a disposition permit if you do not use a sub-registrar. Planning ahead can shorten wait times to get the disposition completed and shorten storage times for decedents.

Stay safe and stay healthy!

Authored by OFDA COVID-19 Spokesperson Gary Burr, CFSP, Immed. Past President