

Chairman Wood, Chairman Nazarian, Members of the Assembly Health and Aging & Long-Term Care Committees: Thank you for this opportunity.

John F Kennedy quoted the historian Toynbee, *“that a society's quality and durability can best be measured by the respect and care given its elderly citizens.”*

How does our society measure up during this pandemic? If we take measure by words and platitudes, we do fine. Federal, state, and local officials, as well as the nursing home industry, have used many of the right words. Words that didn't help George Chin, an 80-year-old man who died in a nursing home from COVID-19 on April 22. George's son Simon wanted to know if his father's death was preventable. The unfortunate answer is yes. The words that the government and industry have been using since March have not saved enough lives. We've needed more action. The type of action that has been taken for the rest of our citizens.

I am President of the California Association of Long Term Care Medicine. We represent the medical voice of long term care in California. My views and testimony today are based on my experience as a geriatrician, running the nursing home arm of the QIO in the state, and being the former CEO of the largest nursing home chain in California.

I want to recognize and thank the incredible people who serve on the front lines in nursing homes. They are incredibly caring and compassionate human beings, many of whom barely make a living wage. Media accounts of nursing home care often ignore their efforts. Too many have given their lives due to the lack of immediate and effective action on the part of the federal government, the state, the counties and the nursing home industry.

COVID-19 will make its way into most nursing homes. What matters is how the facility is prepared and how it responds. Our “Quadruple Aim” starts with the need for every nursing home to have an abundance of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment). The state and nursing home operators have struggled with pandemic related supply chain dynamics. The real estate owners and REITs behind the nursing home industry have the ability to leverage their assets to acquire PPE. As a clinician, I don't care who takes responsibility for the acquisition of PPE. Without PPE, COVID-19 can't be stopped. The government and the industry must transcend all of the obstacles and assure an abundance of PPE for nursing homes.

Nursing homes are mini-hospitals, but with far fewer resources. The American Board of Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine provides a certification for nursing home medical directors, but only a fraction of California's nursing home medical directors have the CMD certification. The vast majority of medical directors in nursing homes around the state are neither certified or fully engaged with their facility leadership team. The negative impact of this has been amplified by COVID-19. The state of California should require all nursing homes to have an engaged, certified medical director. Medical directors must also be allowed to perform their duties without undue influence from nursing home ownership. There should be no quid pro quo related to admissions, and medical directors should be free to provide clinical leadership without fear of losing their position.

The government and industry must fully engage experts in geriatrics and long-term care medicine to protect our vulnerable elders as this pandemic runs its course. You must assure that we are active participants in the policy and decision-making processes that impact the lives of older adults. If the clinical experts had been fully engaged, more lives could have been saved. Thank you again for convening this panel. I look forward to answering your questions.