

SPECIAL ARTICLES

AASM takes the pulse of the sleep field and responds to COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

In these unprecedented times, the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) is committed to supporting its members through initiatives to aid the sleep team and sleep centers in adapting to new health care realities and business needs. Our efforts began in March as shelter-in-place orders took effect throughout the country. The AASM Public Safety Committee mobilized to develop guidance and mitigation strategies while curating resources for sleep physicians and sleep centers to easily access the latest information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and other government agencies. At the height of the pandemic, new information came in daily, and our dedicated COVID-19 resources page served as a central hub for members to access resources on everything ranging from infection control and telemedicine to physician self-care.¹

COVID-19 PULSE SURVEY

When most areas of the country were back to work, the AASM surveyed its members to better understand the impact of the pandemic on sleep medicine practices and facilities. Results of the AASM's COVID-19 pulse survey, completed by 551 members in late July and early August 2020, found that about 46% are concerned about the ability of their practice or facility to remain financially solvent through the end of the year (Figure 1).² Additionally, 66% reported a lower patient volume in the last month (Figure 2), and 36% reported that their practice or facility had to apply for loans or other financial assistance due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 3).

AASM INITIATIVES

These economic concerns are troubling, and the AASM stands ready to support our members and the sleep field in as many ways as possible. Because sleep centers have taken a significant financial hit from the pandemic, we are waiving AASM-accredited sleep facilities' membership dues

for 2021, allowing them to maintain access to important member benefits while having one less financial commitment. As of September 2020, the AASM has awarded \$87,500 to nine state and regional sleep societies that lost revenue when educational conferences were cancelled or rescheduled due to the pandemic, and we are accepting applications for a second round of funding from our COVID-19 relief fund. We have provided free subscription extensions to the AASM Sleep ISR interscorer reliability assessment system and free, three-month, member access to the AASM Sleep™ telemedicine system to further help members navigate the challenges of providing important care during the pandemic and ease financial obligations. We also have been able to offer flexibility with accreditation timelines and have begun implementing virtual site visits to streamline the accreditation process. These are just a few examples of the many ways in which the AASM has responded to the needs of our members (Figure 4).

NEXT STEPS

The AASM board of directors continues to be attentive to these needs, and we are exploring additional ways to provide support in the face of an extraordinarily challenging season. Members responding to open-ended survey questions indicated that they are looking for additional advocacy and more COVID-19 guidance. Our newly created COVID-19 Task Force and Telemedicine Presidential Committee are identifying and developing additional resources to benefit members in the weeks and months ahead as we continue to practice sleep medicine in a new and ever-changing environment. We have been collaborating with the American Medical Association (AMA) and other medical societies to advocate for financial relief for physician practices, and we worked with the AMA on the development of a new Current Procedural Terminology code for reporting additional supplies, materials and clinical staff time required to provide safe and effective care during the COVID-19 public health emergency.³ The AMA has submitted recommendations to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services about payment for the new code. The AASM also is advocating for reimbursement of

Figure 1—Are you concerned about the ability of your practice/facility to remain financially solvent through the end of the year? 551 respondents.

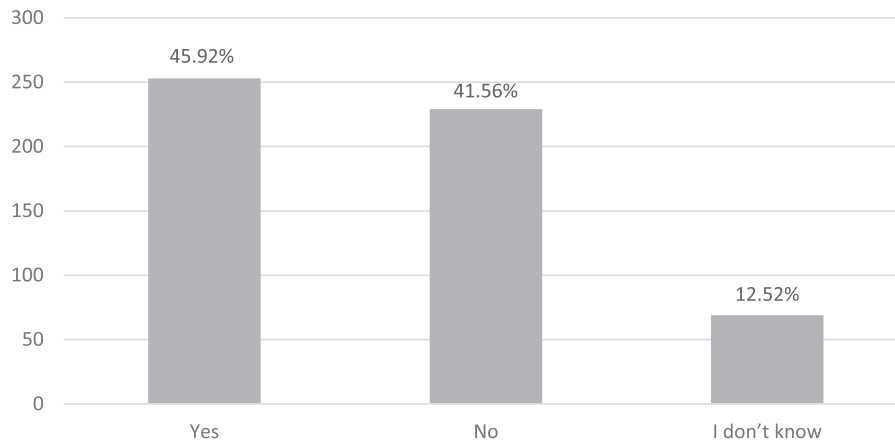


Figure 2—How has your patient volume changed in the last month? 551 respondents.

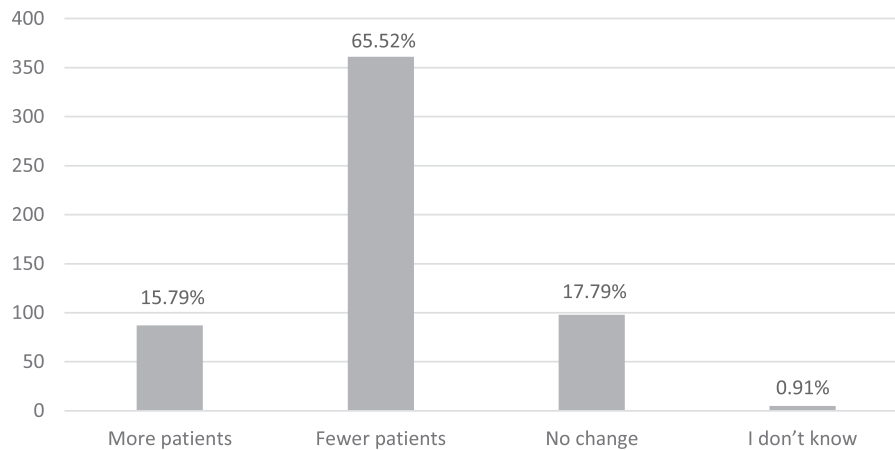
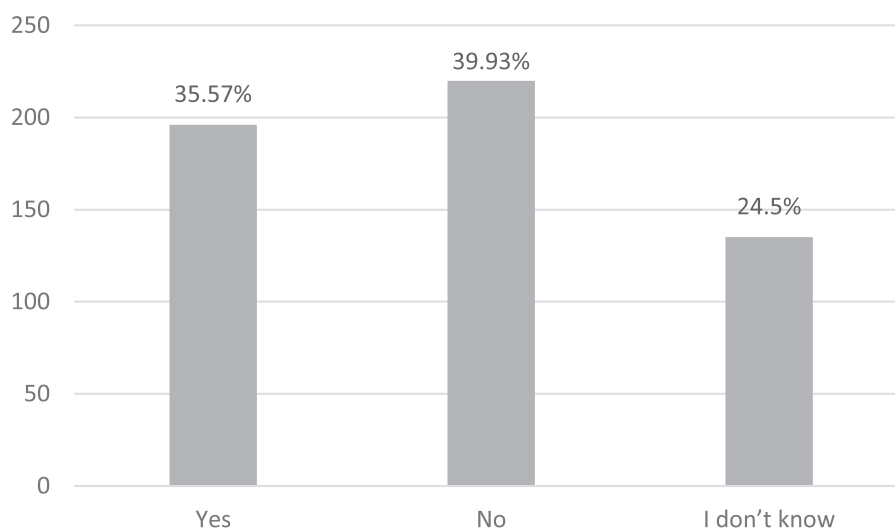


Figure 3—Has your practice/facility had to apply for loans or other financial assistance due to COVID-19? 551 respondents.



telemedicine to be permanent when the current public health emergency ends. Our survey shows that 62% of members anticipate that their postpandemic use of telemedicine

will be greater than it was prior to COVID-19 (Figure 5), and 45% say telemedicine helped them adapt during the emergency (Figure 6).

Figure 4—AASM response to COVID-19 through September 2020.

- Waiving facility membership dues in 2021 for AASM-accredited sleep facilities
- Provided FREE 3-month subscription extensions for AASM Sleep ISR
- Provided FREE 3-month member access to AASM Sleep™ Select telemedicine system
- COVID-19 Relief Fund for state and regional sleep societies
- AASM Foundation COVID-19 Relief Fund for current award recipients
- Accreditation flexibility & virtual site visits
- New COVID-19 Task Force
- New Telemedicine Presidential Committee
- Summary of CDC recommendations
- Considerations for the practice of sleep medicine
- FAQs for sleep clinicians
- Clinical Conversation videos
- JCSM COVID-19 collection
- Telemedicine video & FREE lecture series
- Health policy & legislation webinar
- Self-care webinar

Figure 5—Once the pandemic is resolved, and if telemedicine services are adequately reimbursed, how much will your practice/facility use telemedicine? 551 respondents.

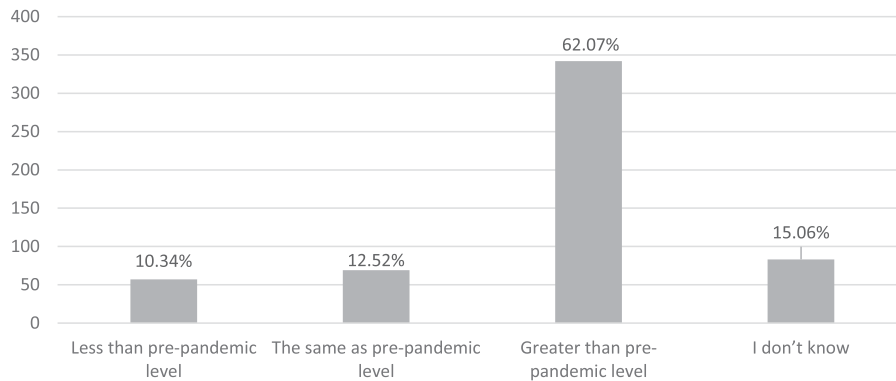
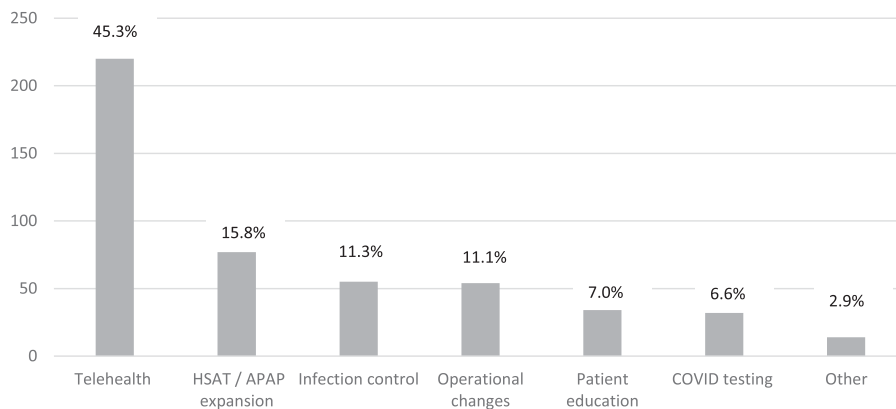


Figure 6—What are 1-2 strategies that have helped your practice/facility adapt during the pandemic? 379 respondents and 486 responses.



CONCLUSIONS

Much has changed this year, and the AASM will support our members as we navigate these challenges together and look for

opportunities to be innovative in our solutions. In addition to the initiatives outlined here, we must anticipate that COVID-19 will have long-term implications for patient care. Also, with the rapidly evolving technological advances, the way we practice

sleep medicine will change. The AASM leadership is keeping a pulse on these trends and will provide further guidance and initiatives that will be shared with our members. Adaptability and flexibility will continue to help as we move forward. Together, we can overcome these challenges and strengthen our field for the future.

CITATION

Ramar K. AASM takes the pulse of the sleep field and responds to COVID-19. *J Clin Sleep Med*. 2020;16(11):1939–1942.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Dr. Ramar is the 2020–2021 president of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.