Dear Hospital Marketing Contacts,

The message below was sent to GHA-member hospital CEOs today. Please let me know if you have any questions.

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TO: ALL GHA MEMBER CEOs

We recognize you are being inundated with information surrounding the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19). I would like to provide you with additional information intended to clarify GHA’s current role, serving in a coordinated effort to prepare for a potential situation in Georgia.

As you are aware, GHA serves as a contractor to the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) for the provision of services collectively referred to as the Healthcare Preparedness Program. The Healthcare Preparedness Program intends to provide a continuous state of readiness so, as potential emergencies like the coronavirus surface, we are prepared.

More specifically, GHA helps maintain a communication and emergency support infrastructure that flows from DPH to GHA to 14 Regional Coordinating Hospitals (RCH), along with Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, to their 14 regional Health Care Coalitions. While the RCHs serve as the leaders of the coalitions and all Georgia hospitals are assigned to a coalition, the coalitions also include many other health care providers, including public health departments, EMS, long-term care facilities and the like. (To identify your region, view the map here.)

During a public health emergency, DPH takes the lead on the emergency response through a predetermined chain of command at the State’s Emergency Operation Center if and when it is activated. We serve in a supportive role to them and report to a Public Health representative on the State’s Emergency Support Function 8 (Health & Medical) Response Team.

In short, the statewide (hospital) procedure for preparing for, and responding to, an infectious disease outbreak such as the coronavirus comes from your own hospital’s plans, which should be inclusive of the State’s infectious disease response plan. This plan was developed during the Ebola outbreak and has served as a model nationwide.

Part of this plan entails communication coming from our emergency preparedness department to the 14 designated individuals among each of the RCHs, plus CHOA. Those individuals then engage their respective hospitals and coalitions.

While this information may be “old hat” to some of you, it is important enough to remind everyone.

As for now:
▪ GHA is in regular contact with the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) and is maintaining situational awareness.
▪ We have facilitated, and will continue to facilitate, access to webinars with subject matter experts.
▪ We have a Coronavirus web page with dedicated resources and information.
▪ We are in regular communication with our 14 RCHs and CHOA. This will serve as the official communication and, if needed, aid and assistance infrastructure in the event of such an emergency.
▪ We are finalizing deployment of our previously awarded Ebola Grant contract funds to our health care coalitions and to our hospitals who have been deemed Assessment or Treatment facilities.
▪ We will continue to maintain GHA911, our website for emergency response personnel, which contains tools for posting information during an event such as bed availability and hospital needs.

On a related note, we understand that some members are experiencing, or can expect to experience, some irregularities in their normal supply chain of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Irregularities may include shortages, delays, pricing increases and so forth. These supply chain issues may not yet be pervasive or critical but are certainly something of which to be aware. Information to help better manage your use of PPE can be found on the CDC’s website, along with other valuable information for your staff to reference.

We’ve also been asked to remind everyone that this is a good opportunity to refresh your employees about your existing infection prevention protocols, as those basic protocols remain the best defense. We will continue to follow the predetermined emergency response plans through our existing coalition infrastructure while continuing to look for other ways to help you be as prepared as possible.