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**STATEMENT FROM THE WEST VIRGINIA HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION REGARDING
COVID-19 AND HOSPITAL CAPACITY**

CHARLESTON, WV – Joe Letnaunchyn, President and CEO of the West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA), provides the following statement regarding COVID-19 and hospital capacity:

West Virginia hospitals have emergency response plans that include surge capacity procedures to address an influx of patients. To prepare for a surge, West Virginia hospitals and health systems are focusing on three core areas: patient care, facilities and staff.

- Over the last couple of days, we've seen hospitals and health systems in West Virginia revising patient care procedures to help increase capacity in several areas. Some hospitals are reviewing and rescheduling elective procedures, while maintaining the safety and health of patients as a top priority, and utilizing virtual visits, when appropriate, for both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 related cases to help increase capacity. Ensuring that patients are discharged on time and are prescribed any necessary medication at the time of discharge are also important factors that can help make an impact.
- Capacity can also be increased by incorporating facility changes. Hospitals are reviewing triage practices with ambulatory services and testing protocols with public health departments and laboratories, to make sure only individuals requiring hospitalization are entering a facility. To this end, West Virginia hospitals and health systems are implementing visitor restrictions to help protect the safety of healthcare workers and patients. While these restrictions may be burdensome for some, they are being implemented to protect frontline caregivers and critically ill individuals from the spread of COVID-19. We ask for the public's patience and support as hospitals implement these requirements to screen not only visitors but staff entering their buildings. These additional processes make it even more critical that people who do not absolutely need to be at the hospital do not go there. We continue to urge patients who have COVID-19 symptoms, who need to be seen

but are not experiencing an emergency, to call their primary care provider's office for guidance before traveling to any healthcare facility in person. If you do not have a healthcare provider, call your local hospital or primary care center for a referral.

- Hospitals are communicating across health systems and through medical partnerships to ensure sharing of supplies, if necessary. Emergency plans also allow hospitals to convert portions of their facilities for infectious disease treatment, including but not limited to, utilization of alternative treatment sites. Such setups limit exposure for both staff and patients, while allowing patients who may not require critical care to be treated. We are seeing these practices throughout West Virginia's hospital and health system community.
- Hospital staff also play a crucial role in expanding hospital capacity. Providing support infrastructure for hospital staff is vital, since due to school closures, many hospital staff must find appropriate childcare. While some facilities offer their own childcare to employees, regulatory efforts are being explored to accommodate healthcare providers who anticipate a large need for their staff.

The efforts implemented across West Virginia to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 should be applauded. Moving forward, West Virginia's healthcare industry needs the public's help to continue to practice appropriate hygiene precautions; to utilize healthcare services wisely; and to support our healthcare workforce as we work together to slow the anticipated spread of this disease.

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The West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA) is a not-for-profit statewide organization representing 62 hospitals and health systems across the continuum of care. The WVHA was founded in 1925 to serve as the collective voice of the state's hospital community. Today, the mission of the WVHA is to support its members in achieving a strong, healthy West Virginia. Members of the Association envision a strong healthcare system that supports optimizing the health status of West Virginians served by hospitals and improving the economic condition of the state. The values of quality, transparency, integrity, collaboration and innovation guide the actions of the Association so that member hospitals and health systems can provide high-quality, affordable, accessible healthcare for West Virginia families and communities. The Association is proud to be a part of the state's hospital industry, adding value to the health and wellness of West Virginians. In addition to representing hospitals and health systems, the WVHA includes associate member organizations that partner with West Virginia's hospitals.