



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Kavanagh

## Kavanagh, Colleagues Propose 'Compassionate Helpers' Volunteer Program to Aid Patients Facing Isolation During Hospitalization

BRIAN KAVANAGH April 29, 2020

| ISSUE: **HOSPITALS, COVID-19**

# HOSPITAL

On April 29, Senator Kavanagh, along with Senator David Carlucci and 23 of their Senate colleagues, proposed that hospitals take measures to help patients facing isolation during their hospitalization by creating 'Compassionate Helper Volunteer Programs.' With proper protections, Compassionate Helpers could aid patients in staying connected with their loved ones and their communities, while also easing a small portion of the demands placed on healthcare workers. The text of the legislators' letter is below; the original may be viewed via the link above.

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April 29, 2020

Healthcare Association of New York State (HANYS)

One Empire Drive

Rensselaer, NY 12144

Greater New York Hospitals Association (GNYHA)

555 West 57th Street

15th Floor

New York, NY 10019

Dear New York Hospital CEOs and Chief Administrators,

We commend our hospitals for the work they have been doing on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. You have demonstrated great commitment and leadership and shown the nation New York's strength. One of the greatest tragedies of the COVID-19 pandemic has been patients' isolation during their hospitalization.

We propose that your hospitals create new Compassionate Helper Volunteer Programs to connect families with their loved ones while they are hospitalized. These programs will identify individuals who can aid in non-medical, quality-of-life activities to ease a patient's and their family's fear due to separation. These volunteers can also assist in strengthening cultural competency and overcoming language barriers between the patient and staff. The presence of these individuals would provide some much-needed relief to our overwhelmed hospital staff.

Of course, it would be essential to minimize the likelihood that Compassionate Helpers would become infected with COVID-19. Compassionate Helpers would require personal protection equipment and training, and would follow any volunteer protocols already in place, for example, receiving the tuberculosis vaccine or other typical measures that are taken to maintain patient, staff, and volunteer health and safety. To the extent medical science develops the ability to detect immunity from COVID-19, for example through antibody testing, the program could prioritize those with immunity in accepting volunteers. We would encourage the State and City health departments to work with you to develop standards for selection, training, and deploying Compassionate Helpers in your institutions. A Compassionate Helper might be a family member of someone who is currently hospitalized as long as they meet the selection criteria and have been appropriately trained.

Compassionate Helpers can ease a small portion of the demands placed on health care workers by comforting patients in overly taxed healthcare facilities. Compassionate Helpers can assist the patient with cell phone or iPad contact with families or friends so there is direct interaction during times of greatest need. If a patient is not able to communicate, the Helper will inform the families on non-medical, but quality of life matters.

The hospitals will have control over who is accepted as a Compassionate Helper, and has control to terminate any individual who is not working in the best interest of the patient and the families involved. We believe that such program will give peace of mind to patients and their families, as well as help lessen the strain on our frontline healthcare workers.

Sincerely,

Senator David Carlucci

Senator Brian Kavanagh

Senator Brian A. Benjamin  
Senator Todd Kaminsky  
Senator Joseph Addabbo  
Senator Zellnor Myrie  
Senator James Skoufis  
Senator Jamaal T. Bailey  
Senator Roxanne J. Persaud  
Senator Robert Jackson  
Senator John C. Liu  
Senator Jen Metzger  
Senator Andrew Gounardes  
Senator George Amedore  
Senator James Sanders Jr.  
Senator Velmanette Montgomery  
Senator Jessica Ramos  
Senator Leroy Comrie  
Senator Peter B. Harckham  
Senator Luis Sepulveda  
Senator Diane Savino  
Senator Julia Salazar  
Senator Kevin Parker  
Senator Alessandra Biaggi  
Senator Phil Boyle

cc: Howard Zucker, M.D., J.D., Commissioner, NYS Department of Health

Oxiris Barbot, M.D., Commissioner, NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene