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The health and safety of all Michiganders is core to the mission of the Michigan Otolaryngology Society. As such, we believe that as vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) become available, the first doses should be provided to people at greatest risk for severe illness or further spreading disease. The CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommended that health care workers and long-term care facility residents receive the first wave of vaccines. However, because of limited supplies, sub-prioritization is necessary.

The work of otolaryngologists puts them and their families at risk for acquiring COVID-19, and if the disease is contracted, subsequent illness and/or mandatory isolation will adversely affect the availability of medical care for all patients. With this in mind, we advocate early access to vaccination for Michigan otolaryngologists and associated staff with similar direct exposure to aerosol generating procedures. We also support prioritization of those at risk for severe disease and those that work with acutely ill COVID-19 patients in fields such as critical care, anesthesiology, emergency medicine, and pulmonology.

Otolaryngologists regularly examine and operate on areas of the body known to harbor SARS-CoV-2 and some of the earliest reports on health-care related spread have been related to otolaryngologic procedures. Close examination and aerosol generating procedures involving mucosal surfaces of the head and neck are requisite to quality otolaryngologic care. Because of limitations in testing, this is often done on people in whom COVID status cannot be known, so spread to otolaryngologists and support staff, as well as to subsequent patients is a significant risk.

We recognize that vaccination is only part of a solution that also includes continued use of PPE, physical distancing, and limiting gatherings until a critical mass of the population is vaccinated and community transmission has decreased. As health care professionals and members of the larger Michigan and US community, we will practice these measures in our personal lives and whenever possible in our professional lives. We know that working together is the only way to get through this crisis as safely as possible.

Sincerely,

Ross Mayerhoff, MD  
2020-2021 MOS President