Statement for the Record

Of

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Before the

House Committee on Oversight and Reform

Regarding the Hearing

Protecting the Timely Delivery of Mail, Medicine, and Mail-in Ballots

August 24, 2020
Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and distinguished members of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the Committee’s record of its hearing entitled “Protecting the Timely Delivery of Mail, Medicine, and Mail-in Ballots.”

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) is the nation’s leading group of physicians providing health care for women and is dedicated to the advancement of women’s health. With more than 60,000 members, ACOG advocates for quality health care for women, maintains the highest standards of clinical practice and continuing education of its members, promotes patient education, and increases awareness among its members and the public of the changing issues facing women’s health care. ACOG supports efforts to promote the dignity, autonomy, rights and health of women in the United States and abroad. This includes the rights and ability of women to vote and to fully participate in the political process. It also includes the ability to access the best available, scientifically based healthcare. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, ACOG is the source for the latest clinical guidance and recommendations for obstetrician-gynecologists to optimize care in the context of COVID-19, including the provision of high-quality care via telehealth, and advancing health equity both during and beyond the pandemic.

Recent and ongoing delays to the United States Postal Service represent a threat to public health, including women’s health. Undermining the postal service has a particularly adverse effect on our nation’s veterans and on individuals living in rural communities or who face other structural barriers to accessing care. While timely delivery of the mail is important in the best of times, it is especially critical during a global pandemic where the mail is critical for people to receive medication, including lifesaving medications, without risking additional exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Disruptions to the postal service’s most basic functions are highly concerning and are already having a negative effect on women, including women veterans.

In 2019, mail-order pharmacies delivered more than 171 million prescriptions. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the VA Mail Order Pharmacy processes 470,000 prescriptions every day and more than 330,000 veterans receive a prescription by mail every work day. It is estimated that approximately 80% of the outpatient prescriptions in the VA health system are distributed by mail. Mailing medications has been practiced for well over a century, with the use of mail-order pharmacies for prescription drugs increasing over the past thirty years, with some plans now requiring or incentivizing the use of these pharmacies.

Obstetric and gynecologic patients rely on mail delivery to get the prescribed medications they need, including contraception and maintenance medications to control chronic conditions including hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, a leading cause of death among women in the United States and a major factor in the nation’s maternal mortality crisis. Mail order of prescription medications facilitates effective use of telehealth, improves rural access to care, aids in adherence to medication, and – especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic – helps patients obtain needed medication without the risks associated with entering a pharmacy.
ACOG has long advocated for telehealth and greater accessibility of care. Yet, this work has become ever more important since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Increased adoption of telehealth has helped obstetric and gynecologic patients get the care they need without exposing themselves to potential COVID-19 infection. An integral part of this care is mail-order delivery of prescription medications. ACOG’s COVID-19 clinical guidance specifically recommends that physicians and clinicians encourage their patients to fill prescriptions through the mail as one strategy to mitigate risk to the virus and ensure continuity of care.iii ACOG is highly concerned by accounts from its members who have recently begun reporting patient complaints of delays in receiving prescribed medication through the mail. Timely, reliable delivery is critical to ensure that patients’ health and quality of life does not suffer.

As the Committee is well-aware, the nation faces two major public health crises: it faces a global pandemic as well as a maternal mortality crisis—the United States is the only industrialized nation in the world with a rising maternal mortality rate.iv With respect to both of these crises, there are stark racial inequities creating unacceptable disparate outcomes. Restricting or delaying the ability of people to obtain their medications by mail only worsens the country’s major public health crises and threatens patient access to basic health care. Compounding these concerns is the threat that undermining the U.S. Postal Service presents to the political process and voter enfranchisement during an election year.

Thank you for holding this important hearing, and for the opportunity to highlight the importance of timely delivery of medication for women and people who seek obstetric and gynecologic care. ACOG looks forward to continuing to work with the Committee to ensure continued access to this critical service.

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ii Kaiser Family Foundation. Number of Mail Order Prescriptions Drugs by Payer. 2019. Retrieved from https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/state-indicator/number-of-mail-order-prescriptions-drugs-by-payer/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22%22%22Location%22%22%22sort%22%22%22asc%22%22%22.


