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Dear Dr. Walensky:

The American Society of Hematology (ASH) is reaching out to share our continued concern about individuals with hematologic conditions and especially disadvantaged individuals with hematologic diseases who are at risk for severe COVID-19 infection and adverse outcomes. We also write with urgency to express our grave concern that these same individuals – our patients – are not being prioritized to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in some states.

ASH represents more than 17,000 clinicians and scientists worldwide who are committed to the study and treatment of blood and blood-related diseases. These disorders encompass malignant hematologic disorders such as leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma, as well as non-malignant conditions such as sickle cell disease (SCD), thalassemia, bone marrow failure, venous thromboembolism, and hemophilia. In addition, hematologists are pioneers in developing novel treatments for various hematologic diseases and continue to be innovators in the fields of stem cell biology, regenerative medicine, transfusion medicine, and gene therapy. The Society is also committed to combating inequities in hematology by advocating for policies and supporting programs that aim to eliminate health disparities in the care of hematology patients.

As you are well aware, data on the impact of COVID-19 in the U.S. shows a disproportionate impact on the African American and Latinx population, due to fragmented systems of care and underlying comorbid conditions. Individuals in communities of color who have hematologic diseases and disorders such as multiple myeloma or SCD are at great risk for contracting COVID-19 and complications from the infection. [Data](#) analyzed from ASH Research Collaborative's COVID 19 Registry shows significant morbidity and mortality for individuals with blood cancers. Other efforts ([Secure-SCD Registry](#), [Surveillance Epidemiology of Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Under Research Exclusion](#)) have demonstrated increased risk for subpopulations with non-malignant hematologic conditions as well, including SCD.

The Society applauds the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for acknowledging that individuals with cancer and SCD are among those with medical conditions that put them at increased risk for poor outcomes of COVID-19. Additionally, we appreciate CDC's goal of reducing the extra burden COVID-19 is having on people already facing disparities. We are pleased that the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that persons aged 16–64 years with certain medical conditions at increased risk for severe COVID-19 be prioritized for receiving the COVID-19 vaccine

in Phase 1c. Furthermore, we note ACIP's report from its January 27, 2021, meeting that certain states in the United States are prioritizing patients with active cancer and survivors of cancer in a number of ways.

ASH, however, is concerned that there is no consistency among states for prioritizing COVID-19 vaccines to individuals with medically compromised conditions including those in minority populations who have rare hematologic diseases and disorders. A recent [Washington Post article](#) highlights how states are prioritizing who should be receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, specifically noting that patients with high-risk medical conditions are losing priority status under many state plans. [Kaiser Health News](#) recently reported on states that are moving to age-based versus disease-based prioritization for the vaccine. **It is in this regard that we implore CDC to focus attention on those states that are not placing necessary emphasis on providing vaccine access to those who are immunocompromised, and in particular individuals living with SCD and others with hematologic malignancies.** Vaccinating patients with high-risk medical conditions offers the best protection against the threat of contracting the virus and will help save lives.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please reach out to Suzanne Leous, Chief Policy Officer, at sleous@hematology.org or 202-412-7531 (mobile) if the Society can provide additional information or answer any questions.

Best regards,



Martin S. Tallman, MD
President

cc: Anne Schuchat, MD (RADM, USPHS, RET), Principal Deputy Director
Lisa C. Richardson, MD, MPH, Director, Division, Cancer Prevention and Control
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