June 2, 2020

COVID-19 & Beyond

By Stanley Nachimson, MS
Original story posted on RACmonitor: May 29, 2020

EDITOR’S NOTE: Stanley Nachimson, former Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) career professional-turned-well-known healthcare IT authority, is a longtime ICD10monitor contributing editor and a popular panelist on Talk Ten Tuesdays who has a monthly segment called RegWatch during which time he reports on the latest regulatory news coming out of Washington, D.C.

Yes, we are in a pandemic. The loss of over 100,000 lives in the US, and over 350,000 worldwide is a tragedy. The incredible economic displacement of millions more is also a tragedy. The overwhelming burden on hospital and healthcare providers has been excruciating to watch on the nightly news.

I am one of the lucky ones. No one in my immediate family has the virus. I have known some folks who had at and have recovered. My work has not been materially impacted; in fact, I have a few major projects that are continuing in spite of the pandemic.

There have been few negative impacts for me. Several conferences I planned to attend and speak at were cancelled, so I didn’t get the chance to visit Cleveland or Jacksonville. And I missed the opportunity for personal contact with many colleagues.

Our summer planned trip to London and Paris was cancelled, so I guess we will go another time.

I was pretty well versed in the technology for virtual meetings, so it was not a
stretch for me to participate. It has been nice to see so many of my family, friends, and acquaintances pick up on the technology and use it.

And I am fortunate to be living in Florida where we have not been overwhelmed by the virus. In fact, we are opening up nicely, with restaurants at 50 percent capacity, businesses opening (especially the hair and nail salons), pools opening, golf courses open. It has been a personal inconvenience, luckily not a personal tragedy.

As I am in the stage of getting back to some sort of normalcy, I have been thinking of the path forward for all of us. And there will be a path. Our society has not been given a fatal diagnosis, although we have certainly suffered.

Going out to eat at a restaurant and having a normal conversation with friends and family at the table has been refreshing. Sitting at the pool on a sunny day is amazing and continues to remind me of how fortunate I am and how wonderful life can be. Getting in the car and driving to a store at a normal time and having a normal shopping list is another simple pleasure.

We have discovered that there are things that work well in certain circumstances (telehealth, some virtual meetings). Some do not work well - funerals on Zoom are nowhere near what they should be. We cannot close down the entire economy for too long. We need accurate medical and scientific information as soon as possible, but it has to be vetted and it has to be reliable.

We have seen that our health care system can accomplish extraordinary things. It bent, but it did not break. There are some adjustments we need to make, but a wholesale restructuring is not a necessity.

I am seeing the first webinars and articles about "Post Covid-19". That is an encouraging sign. The pushback against lockdowns is an example of people itching to return to some semblance of normal, and that will happen. For some, sooner than others depending on their situation. But it is clear that the trend is moving towards the normal instead of away from it.

Some concluding observations - we will not rebuild a health care system that is set up to handle a pandemic 365 days a year. We will try to set up some preparatory systems. We will be looking at some of the changes and see what will be worth keeping (telehealth, more flexibility for practitioners to practice across state lines and up to their licensed ability). But my guess is that we will be much closer to the way we were than the way we are now.