

[Date]

[Name, Degree, Title]

[Company Address]

[City, State, Zip]

Dear [NAME]:

Rheumatology practices are facing extreme clinical and economic challenges as a result of COVID-19. The Association of Women in Rheumatology (AWIR) requests that [Company Name] consider the following struggles and suggested improvements in policy to help alleviate this pressure on rheumatology practices. Providers of rheumatology must remain focused on patient care and not delay maintenance treatments or critical services, which include in-office biologic infusions and SQ treatments.

It is critical that our patients get their well-established maintenance therapies that keep them in remission, so they do not flare, or require steroids, or worse still, get hospitalized in the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic. This invaluable service is offered by our offices, but we should not have to experience financial hardship due to burdensome requirements during this unpresented time. As such, we are setting forth our requests to insurance companies; distributors and vendors; and pharmaceutical companies to protect our patients’ continuity of care.

**AWIR requests that all *Insurance Companies* implement the following during the COVID-19 public health crisis:**

With the influx of patients seeking care virtually, as well as the urgent need to update workflows and other health IT system adjustments, rheumatologists need to focus on using their health IT systems to address the emergent COVID-19 national emergency. Therefore, the requirement for rheumatologists to be present during in-office treatment administration should be waived.

In addition, AWIR providers of rheumatology are experiencing increased care delays due to prior authorization (PA) requirements. We are recommending that insurers temporarily waive PA requirements for prescription medications during this national public health emergency.

AWIR is also requesting exceptions from reporting requirements and extensions be given to providers participating in reporting programs with respect to upcoming measure reporting and data submission.

**AWIR requests assistance and support for the administration and payment of in-office infusions and SQ injections from *Distributors and Vendors:***

Rheumatology practices are not able to provide these services to as many patients as usual during a specified period of time because of necessary safety precautions put in place to protect patients and staff from increased COVID-19 exposure.

As a result of prioritizing and limiting patients’ exposure to COVID-19, the turnaround time on administering biologics has increased. AWIR requests that vendors significantly relax payment terms (from the normal Net 90 to Net 180) for biologic drugs during the pandemic and offer practices a time extension for payments due for biological drugs to ease this burden.

**AWIR requests the following consideration from *Pharmaceutical Manufacturers:***

Currently, high bars are set for a practice’s eligibility to receive rebates on the medications they administer in-office. In order to protect the health of our most vulnerable patients, our appointments have become more spread out to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure in our labs. Some patients are also cancelling due to COVID-19 fears. Therefore, it has become impossible to treat multiple patients at the same time in our labs. Given this, rheumatology practices and providers are losing rebates that they typically receive from manufacturers. This imposes a risk to the viability of our practices. AWIR asks that manufacturers waive the strict rebate criterium and significantly reduce the criteria during the COVID-19 crisis.

*In sum, clinicians need to be able to focus their energy and resources on safely treating patients during this pandemic; rather than having to meet payment deadlines or fear the impact of rebate programs on their bottom lines for reasons outside of their control.*

Now more than ever, our healthcare system needs an all hands-on deck approach; and there is still much more that can and should be done. We sincerely appreciate [COMPANY] urgent consideration of our recommendations to make these necessary policy adjustments. Please contact AWIR’s Government Affairs Specialist at Heather.Kazmark@naylor.com with any questions.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Place of Practice]

[Address]

[Contact Information]