



AGING TODAY **Parallel Epidemic**



By Bob Roth, Managing Partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions

The past 7 seven months have been transformative, as we strive to learn in real time the subtle nuances between living and surviving in a pandemic world.

In early March when many were wiping down every grocery item they brought into the home, I can't help but think of the lovable neurotic character played by Ben Stiller, in the movie, "Along Came Polly". Reuben Feffer, a professional risk manager, avoided subway grates with the knowledge that there is a 1 in 46,000 chance of falling through. This begs the question; can extreme fear undermine your ability to stay healthy during the pandemic?

Specifically, whether for routine or more pressing medical care, your missed doctors' appointments are putting you at risk. The coronavirus pandemic has caused an unknown number of missed or delayed diagnoses for non-COVID conditions. This parallel epidemic of harm is one of the yet-to-be-told stories of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The temporary suspension of some medical services beginning in March, caused some patients to avoid seeking medical care altogether. There were dramatic declines in the Emergency Department with patients who really did need emergency services staying home. Heart attack and stroke teams, always poised to rush in and save lives, were mostly idle.

Watching the news reports from Italy and New York with the hospitals overloaded may have subliminally planted the seed that healthcare facilities were places of peril. Navigating the uncertainty for at least the next year, we must remember that it is imperative to maintain our health by continuing medical care.

The US National Cancer Institute (NCI) studied pandemic-related delays in screening and treatment for breast and colorectal cancer and projected there will be approximately 10,000 "excess" deaths over the next 10 years.

Ignoring life-threatening non-COVID-19 conditions such as cancer for too long may turn one public health crisis into many others.

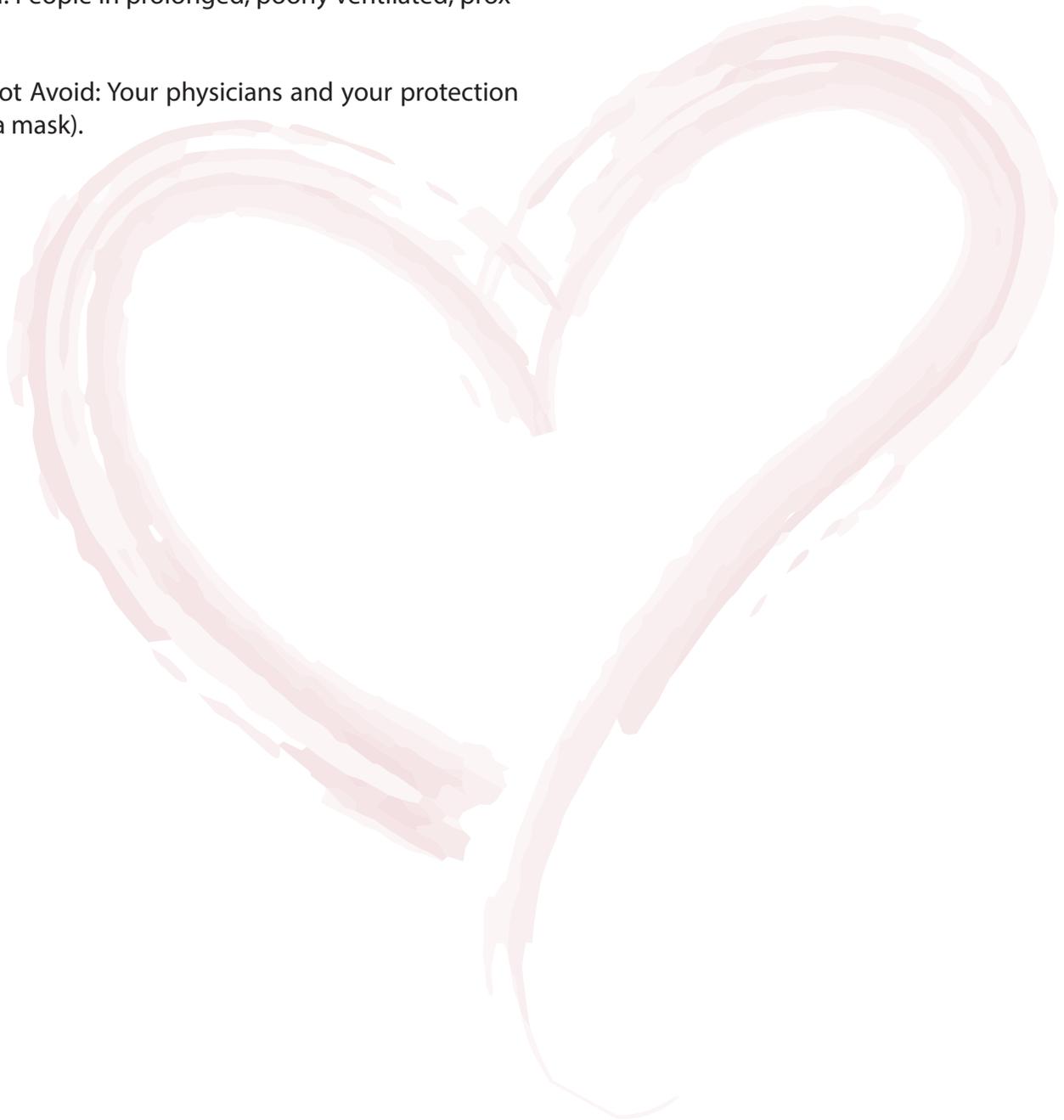
One of the good things that has come out of this pandemic is advancement of telemedicine. It's a great way for physicians to stay in contact with their patients. With the arrival of COVID-19 and stay-at-home orders instituted across the country, physicians that had not used telemedicine were forced to quickly adopt it so that they could remain engaged with their patients. This form of real-time, audio-video communication allows physicians and patients to connect from different locations existed prior to the pandemic, but certain restrictions limited widespread usage, until now, and now physicians adopting this as a regular alternative. It is a great alternative for older adults that only need to visit their physicians in order to get their prescriptions refills extended. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has relaxed the restrictions relative to the telemedicine platforms, and now allow all types of video conferencing capabilities for both providers and their patients. This gives physicians and patients flexibility; CMS has allowed providers to bill at full rates when previously they were being paid a fraction of what they were being paid for in-person visits.

SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus that we are just beginning to understand. In a pandemic, it is difficult to assess or measure risk. In general, from what I have heard and seen in clinical settings, a doctor's office will be instituting the most stringent precautions with guidance from the CDC to keep patients protected. Importantly, the social interaction that a physician and their support staff provide can be a welcome reprieve from the isolation experienced by many older adults.

Our lovable risk manager Rueben Feffer balanced his fear of loss and lived happily ever after with Polly (Jennifer Aniston). He would approve this strategy that mandates avoid 4 P's and include 2 P's.

- Avoid: People in prolonged, poorly ventilated, proximity.

- Do Not Avoid: Your physicians and your protection (wear a mask).



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