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CARES Act provider relief fund aid to dermatologists in response to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

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To the Editor:

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) placed a strain on outpatient dermatology visits. Data collected from the beginning of the pandemic indicates that the average number of patient visits and biopsies fell by 50% during March, 2020, and providers averaged three days of practice per week. It is also estimated that this trend has continued for the duration of the epidemic [1]. Postponed elective surgeries and “non-urgent” visits contributed to a decline in outpatient visits and to offset financial losses, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is distributing \$175 billion to hospitals and healthcare providers [2]. The goal of our study was to characterize federal direct aid to dermatologists and examine distribution patterns for potential inequalities.

A retrospective analysis of Federal aid through the HHS Provider Relief Fund (PRF) to dermatologists was performed. Dermatologists and number of clinicians were first identified using dermatology as primary specialty from the publicly-available CMS Physician Compare National Downloadable File accessed on July 25, 2020 [3]. The publicly-available HHS PRF database, accessed July 25, 2020, was then used to identify the aid amount using the practice legal names [4]. Any practice that had a legal name indicating hospital ownership or academic institutions were excluded owing to ambiguous data. Any practice that did not have identifiable aid through the HHS Provider Relief Fund was excluded (**Figure 1**). Practices were considered small if they had less than 15 clinicians, medium if they had 15-49

clinicians, and large if they employed 50 or more clinicians [5]. Practices were divided by their geographical location: northeast, southwest, west, southeast, and midwest.

Descriptive statistics were used to characterize distributions of aid and all analyses were performed in Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Corporation; Redmond, WA). This study used publicly available data from CMS and did not require review by an Institutional Review Board.

A total of 2,624 dermatology practices received approximately three billion dollars. Of these practices, 76% were small practices, amounting for five percent of the total aid. Eleven percent of practices were medium sized and received eight percent of the aid. Large practices constituted 13% of the total and received 87% of the aid, with a median of \$2,525,435 per practice (**Table 1**).

When dividing the practices by geographical region, 20% of the practices were from the West, 10% of practices were from the Southwest, 29% of practices were from Southeast, 17% of practices were from

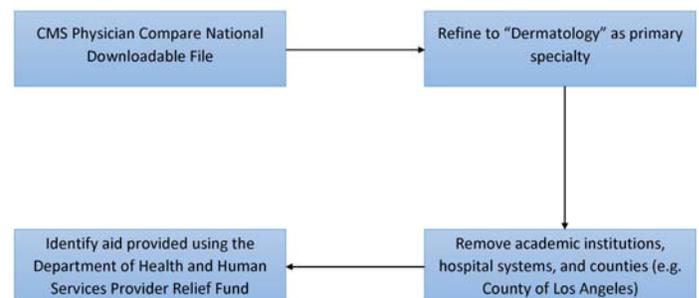


Figure 1. Flow chart for identifying Dermatology practices who received aid through the CARES Act for COVID-19.

Midwest, and 23% of practices from Northeast. The Midwest received the most aid compared to the other geographical areas (29%) with a median of \$100,453. Clinicians from the Southeast practices had the highest median aid per clinician of \$16,253.

The majority of the aid that was provided to dermatology practices was given to practices with 50 or more “clinicians.” Given that the aid provided was based on revenue generated, it is realistic to see that larger practices, which may generate more average revenue, will receive more aid. However, it was expected that small practices would receive a higher aid amount per clinician.

References

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A limitation is that our study was unable to include all the dermatology practices present in the country, as it was difficult to discern the amount of aid given to practices incorporated in larger multi-specialty practices along with academics. Furthermore, our study was cross-sectional, so it is possible that some practices may receive additional aid. As a result, this can serve as a starting point from which future studies can analyze COVID-19’s financial impact.

Potential conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest

Table 1. Descriptive data of aid received by dermatology practices through CARES Act for COVID-19.

	Number (%) or Mean (SD)
Total Practices	2,624 (100)
Total Aid	\$3,165,932,253 ¹ (100)
Median	\$78,049
Mean (SD)	\$3,041,820 (6,677,725)
Minimum Aid	\$196
Maximum Aid	\$123,492,416
Aid/Practice Member	
Median	\$14,044
Mean (SD)	\$19,214 (23,433)
Minimum Aid	\$9
Maximum Aid	\$487,539
Small Practices	1,999 (76)
Total Aid	\$162,494,254 (5)
Median	\$54,233
Mean (SD)	\$81,288 (82,867)
Minimum Aid	\$196
Maximum Aid	\$672,092
Aid/Practice Member	
Median	\$15,020
Mean (SD)	\$18,608 (14,709)
Minimum Aid	\$79
Maximum Aid	\$134,726
Medium Practices	188
Total Aid	\$93,480,048 (8)
Median	\$345,300
Mean (SD)	\$494,603 (850,158)
Minimum Aid	\$11,354
Maximum Aid	\$7,547,244
Aid/Practice Member	
Median	\$13,241
Mean (SD)	\$17,776 (24,393)
Minimum Aid	\$392
Maximum Aid	\$193,756
Large Practices	435 (13)
Total Aid	\$2,909,957,951 (87)
Median	\$1,855,954
Mean (SD)	\$6,674,215 (15,249,187)
Minimum Aid	\$4,399
Maximum Aid	\$123,492,416
Aid/Practice Member	
Median	\$8,244
Mean (SD)	\$22,617 (45,234)
Minimum Aid	\$9
Maximum Aid	\$487,539
West	527 (20)
Total Aid	\$791,458,309 (25)
Median	\$69,157
Mean (SD)	\$1,498,974 (8,333,718)

Minimum Aid	\$315
Maximum Aid	\$101,854,300
Aid/Practice Member	
Median	\$14,413
Mean (SD)	\$20,015 (25,514)
Minimum Aid	\$79
Maximum Aid	\$413,054
Southwest	266 (10)
Total Aid	\$259,674,094 (8)
Median	\$78,356
Mean (SD)	\$972,562 (7,718,436)
Minimum Aid	\$424
Maximum Aid	\$123,492,416
Aid/Practice Member	
Median	\$16,019
Mean (SD)	\$19,751 (16,672)
Minimum Aid	\$212
Maximum Aid	\$132,453
Southeast	753 (29)
Total Aid	\$486,198,114 (15)
Median	\$88,432
Mean (SD)	\$644,825 (3,151,342)
Minimum Aid	\$196
Maximum Aid	\$57,487,020
Aid/Practice Member	
Median	\$16,253
Mean (SD)	\$20,552 (17,433)
Minimum Aid	\$98
Maximum Aid	\$160,774
Midwest	459 (17)
Total Aid	\$918,202,760 (29)
Median	\$100,453
Mean (SD)	\$2,000,442 (7,645,049)
Minimum Aid	\$217
Maximum Aid	\$110,514,646
Aid/Practice Member	
Median	\$12,668
Mean (SD)	\$19,875 (27,724)
Minimum Aid	\$9
Maximum Aid	\$245,227
Northeast	615 (23)
Total Aid	\$710,399,487 (22)
Median	\$66,249
Mean (SD)	\$1,153,245 (6,947,202)
Minimum Aid	\$581
Maximum Aid	\$105,345,390
Aid/Practice Member	
Median	\$11,748
Mean (SD)	\$16,166 (26,590)
Minimum Aid	\$291
Maximum Aid	\$487,539