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Dear Drs. Azar, Hahn and Fauci:

We, like the entire nation, are hopeful that therapeutic interventions now being tested will have great benefit for patients with COVID-19. We are writing to you in particular about hydroxychloroquine, a medication that has captured the attention of both the scientific and lay communities. While we hope that this medication will prove efficacious in this disease, we wish to emphasize to you our concerns for patients with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) who rely on this medication as a standard part of their therapy.

As you are aware, the unproven utility of hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 has already led to shortages in some areas of the country, making it difficult for SLE patients who rely on this medication to refill their prescriptions. This agent has been proven to mitigate SLE disease activity and to prevent flares. It reduces joint pain, rashes, and thrombotic events, and prolongs survival. Research has demonstrated that use of hydroxychloroquine is particularly efficacious for pregnant lupus patients. Importantly, both historic and recent clinical trials have demonstrated that withdrawal of hydroxychloroquine can lead to disease flares, typically over a period of several weeks (1, 2). Not surprisingly, this drug is the single most commonly prescribed medication for SLE according to the latest CMS data.

While we hope that hydroxychloroquine will eventually prove to be effective against COVID-19, we also want to ensure that SLE patients who rely on this medication will continue to have uninterrupted access to it during the pandemic. We are weighing known against unproven benefit. We respectfully request that as we move through this period of uncertainty regarding the utility of hydroxychloroquine in COVID-19, effective measures should be implemented to ensure access to hydroxychloroquine for SLE patients. If the drug proves to be efficacious in both conditions, every effort should be made to ensure that hydroxychloroquine is available to everyone whose health requires it. Perhaps, now is the time to begin planning for that possibility.

Thank you for your work in leading the U.S. efforts against COVID-19, and thank you for your support of SLE patients.

Sincerely,

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