

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 18, 2023

The Honorable Vivek H. Murthy, MD, MBA
Surgeon General of the United States
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Dr. Murthy:

I write to express my concern about the staggering mortality associated with deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE), commonly known as blood clots. Thousands of Americans die from DVT/PE and despite longstanding efforts by stakeholders to mitigate the distressing impacts of blood clots, Americans continue to face disability, suffer serious illness, and risk death due to these conditions. These conditions can impact anybody – from Serena Williams, Hailey Bieber, and Tory Kelly to Dick Cheney, Hilary Clinton and my husband. This serious public health issue necessitates a whole-of-society mobilization. Therefore, I urge you to renew and update the 2008 Call to Action on DVT and PE to raise immediate awareness of the significance of this serious public health challenge.

Renewing this Call to Action on DVT and PE is deeply personal to me as I have experienced losing a loved one to PE. My late husband and the love of my life, Charles Rochester, tore his Achilles tendon playing a game of pickup basketball before a business meeting. Blood clots traveled to his heart and lungs and, at the age of 52, he died. The grief and pain that followed his passing were almost unbearable. But I knew that Charles wouldn't want me to give up, he'd want me to go on. I took that heart-shattering pain and turned it into purpose by deciding to run for Congress where I would be able to raise awareness of and implement policies to combat issues such as DVT/PE.

Deep venous thrombosis occurs when blood clots form in the legs, pelvis, or arms.¹ DVTs can cause disability and illness, but the most life threatening complication of DVT happens when a part of the clot breaks off and travels through the bloodstream to the lungs, causing a blockage called pulmonary embolism.² Pulmonary embolisms can be life threatening and require immediate medical attention because the mortality rate of untreated PE is greater than 30%.³ However, DVT/PE is treatable if discovered early, underscoring the importance of educating the public about the signs and symptoms of these conditions.⁴

In 2008, US Surgeon General, Rear Admiral Steven K. Galson issued a “Call to Action to Prevent Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) and Pulmonary Embolism (PE)” to catalyze widespread

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, June 28). *What is venous thromboembolism?*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dvt/facts.html>

² Ibid

³ Vyas, V., & Goyal, A. (2022, August 8). *Acute Pulmonary Embolism*. NIH National Library of Medicine. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK560551/#:~:text=A%20timely%20diagnosis%20of%20a,8%25%20die%20after%20timely%20therapy.>

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, June 28). *What is venous thromboembolism?*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dvt/facts.html>

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

awareness of the risk factors and triggering events for developing DVT and PE.⁵ At the time, 300,000 Americans were afflicted every year, and more than 100,000 Americans were dying of blood clots.⁶ Yet, fewer than 1 in 10 Americans knew about DVT/PE or were familiar with their symptoms or risk factors.⁷ The Call to Action, a science-based document designed to stimulate action nationwide to solve a significant public health problem, reverberated in reputable journals like the Journal of the American Heart Association, was highlighted by medical societies, and covered by nationally syndicated publications.⁸ Following the Call to Action, evidence-based clinical practice guidelines were established to help providers and novel therapeutics, like Direct Oral Anticoagulants (DOACS) and mechanical thrombectomy, were approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).⁹

While the 2008 Call to Action spurred a national awakening, 15 years later, almost 100,000 Americans continue to die from this preventable disease each year, which is roughly the same number of people who die from drug overdoses and diabetes annually.¹⁰ In total, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that about 900,000 people suffer from DVT/PE per year. But the CDC also recognizes that the exact number of people affected by DVT/PE is unknown. Given that the number one cause of death for the most severe PE is diagnostic failure, it is alarming that DVT/PE continues to be underdiagnosed. Americans still do not understand the gravity of this condition and more must be done to raise awareness among the public.

A renewed call to action may stimulate the development of better epidemiology about the frequency of this condition, better patient awareness, better application of existing guidelines by providers, better treatments and, ultimately, fewer deaths.

Blood clots do not discriminate and impact people of all stripes, creeds, and conditions. I do this work each day with Charles's memory as my guiding light with the hope of saving lives both in my home state of Delaware and across the nation. I urge you to use the power of your office to join me in this effort.

Sincerely,



Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress

⁵ Office of the Surgeon General (US), & National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (US). (2008). *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Deep Vein Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism*. NIH National Library of Medicine. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44178/>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ American Public Health Association. (2003, February 26). *Deep-vein thrombosis: advancing awareness to protect patient lives*. [Paper presentation]. Public Health Leadership Conference on Deep-Vein Thrombosis, Washington, DC, United States. <http://cl-natf-002.masstechnology.com/docs/pdf/APHAWhitePaperonDeep-VeinThrombosis.pdf>

⁸ Rathbun, S. (2009, April 21). *The surgeon general's call to action to prevent deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism*. *Circulation*, 119(15). <https://doi.org/10.1161/circulationaha.108.841403>

⁹ American Society of Hematology. (n.d.). *ASH Clinical Practice Guidelines on Venous Thromboembolism*. Hematology.org.

<https://www.hematology.org/education/clinicians/guidelines-and-quality-care/clinical-practice-guidelines/venous-thromboembolism-guidelines>

¹⁰ National Center for Health Statistics Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, January 18). *FASTSTATS - Leading Causes of Death*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/leading-causes-of-death.htm>