General Guidelines from Magazines:

There is an immediate learning curve when working with stories related to the Coronavirus.

The first thing that is done when talking about an assignment of this sort is to make sure a photographer has health insurance. If the photographer doesn't, the publication tries to secure it for them.

It's important to empower photographers to question why they are doing this and how the organization can best support them. If you are putting yourself in a risky situation, you need to be intentional about why you are wanting to put yourself in that situation. Clarify that before diving into a project. Then you need to know how to protect yourself and others around you.

Assignments are approved all the way up to the top at a very high level. There needs to be an understanding of what the assignment is, and the ability to assess how much contact the photographer is potentially going to have with the virus. It is important to go into a high risk situation thinking as if the subjects have been exposed.

Editors talk to photographers as much as possible with daily check-ins. It's important to start the conversation as a human— checking on the well being of the photographer, asking if they are showing symptoms, has anyone around them shown symptoms, etc. Be a human first, and an editor second. It's not just focusing on the work being made, but also on the personal safety of the photographer.

There needs to be a strong level of trust between the editors and photographers. This is crucial with this type of assignment. Over communication is crucial. It's important for editors to have conversations with the photographers about what they are seeing — how does the story unfold through the photographer’s eyes since what they are seeing in the field can shift the focus in unexpected ways.

If you don't feel safe and don't want to go into a situation, even if on assignment, don't go into the situation. Maybe you don't get the pictures, but the priority should always be the safety of you and others around you.

Ebola is the only thing that we have to compare this way of working with as far as assignments go.

As a photographer you need to step back and see the images you are making and take time to see what is working and what isn't. Look at the stories that are coming out and see how you can make your story different. Get permission at each possible turn— even if it cuts into your access. Legal teams at publications will ask about permission. Consent is important when taking images and using your best judgement. Being a human first and then think of the picture.
Photographers should self assess whether they should be documenting this specific story. Do you have the experience dealing with this level of stress? You need to have an understanding of what this can do to you mentally. Knowing how you will react to something like this. For example, have you seen dead bodies before? Are you equipped to handle seeing that? Knowing yourself and what you can mentally handle is important when thinking about making work on this subject.

*The biggest thing a journalist can do when they are in these risky situations around healthcare workers is to understand that they need to not get in the way of the delivery of care from healthcare to the patient.

Travel stories:

A lot of stories that require travel are a non-starter. Most publications aren't asking people to travel to shoot a story unless they are able to use the necessary PPE and are not putting themselves or anyone else at risk.

PPE:

Some publications have protective gear that they send to the photographers. Everything is done on a case by case basis, but in some situations they need to provide one protective gear set per location. For example, if you go from one hospital to another hospital, you have to change your protective gear at every location.

Health conditions:

Who is being assigned? For the most part it is only photographers with a low risk factor. Editors will not assign someone who is seen as high risk.

Protocols and clearance:

Most discussions are happening on calls because they need to be determined on a case by case basis. There are not standard written guidelines that are being shared with photographers.

There needs to be clearance on everything. There is a lot of internal communication both before and during an assignment. For example, if someone starts to feel sick during an assignment, the assignment stops and the photographer will need to self-quarantine for 14 days before being able to continue.

Some publications are holding daily meetings for all of the photo editors together to check in with each other. This is the time when they discuss story ideas and assess the individual situations of each photographer. This is when they determine which assignments are OK to
move forward with and which ones raise a red flag. They are very cautious about assigning photographers who are not comfortable out in the field right now as they know how important it is to be physically and mentally safe. They will never force a photographer into a situation they are uncomfortable with.