

From: [Schwartz, David](#)
Subject: DOM Covid Communication
Date: Sunday, December 20, 2020 1:02:52 PM
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Dear Friends and Colleagues.

A number of months ago, I wrote that “Science will lead our way out of this crisis. Basic modeling and infectious disease epidemiology has helped us understand what’s coming, the science of social distancing, clinical trials have identified remdesivir as a promising agent, novel serologic assays will identify the extent of disease in our communities, and vaccine development will provide the cure. All of this takes investment, and now is not the time to back away from our scientists or our scientific infrastructure. In fact, now’s the time to double down. We still have to get through this crisis but rest assured there will be human health challenges in the future, and we need to be ready.”

Now with the demonstrated importance of social distancing, the improved care of patients with Covid, and the FDA emergency use approvals of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, it’s time that we recognize and celebrate the truly remarkable advances in our fight against Covid that have been made since the initial transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market only one year ago.

- **Social distancing:** The past few weeks have demonstrated the profound effect that social distancing has had on the transmission of the virus. The story of the coronavirus in America is a compartmentalized one, with different places experiencing different spikes for different reasons at different times. Fortunately, over the past week in Colorado, there’s been an average of about 3,100 cases per day, a decrease of 28% from the average 2 weeks earlier. This decrease in cases per day in Colorado is reflected in the census data in our hospitals, and the state-wide hospitalization data with both peaking and slowly going down since the beginning of December. In contrast, over the past week in the entire U.S., there’s been an average of about 220,000 new cases per day, an increase of 19% from the average 2 weeks earlier. Continue to wear a mask, practice social distancing, and don’t travel over the holidays.
- **Clinical trials:** Over the past year, well-conducted clinical trials (by many of our investigators) have identified what works and what doesn’t. Our improved ability to take care of patients with SARS-CoV-2 infection is reflected in the decreased percent of patients requiring ICU care (55% last spring - 40% now) and a decrease in the number of patients in the ICU requiring intubation (90% last spring - 67% now). Moreover, the survival and re-admission rates continue to improve among our Covid patients.
- **Vaccines:** One year ago, very few people would have predicted that we would be embarking on a vaccination program with two extremely effective vaccines with minimal side effects. This was not a miracle. The development of these vaccines were enabled by many scientific accomplishments (bat virology, DNA sequencing, computational biology, and basic science of RNA, proteins and lymphocyte biology to name a few) that have been supported by the federal government, industry, academia, and public-private partnerships. Investments in science are essential to our future.

I think there are other take home-messages that will continue to strengthen the scientific programs on our campus:

- Team science and scientific partnerships are critical to combining clinical insights with cutting-edge research. Collaborations and social networking will improve the efficiency of research. We need to foster these interactions.
- Public-private partnerships (like the one between the NIH and Moderna) can lead to powerful advances and need to be nurtured.
- Our nation has to place a higher value on science. Part of this involves public education and we’ve got some real opportunities with our patients. However, we should also do everything possible to help Congress recognize the sad lessons learned from the ways science has been pushed aside during the pandemic, and strongly advocate to substantially increase the federal research budget. Take a look at the **Table** that Steve Johnson provide to me demonstrating the disproportionate number of Covid cases and deaths in the U.S.

Lastly, while the future of physician-scientists, women scientists, and early career scientists has long been recognized as in peril, the Covid pandemic has intensified these challenges that arguably threaten their career trajectories and consequently, endanger the very future of academic medicine. The Covid pandemic has disrupted the lives of early career scientists by altering the scope of their clinical responsibilities, reducing available support for academic activities, limiting opportunities for collaborative interactions, and increasing the burden of domestic activities. These additional challenges place more pressure on early career scientists and especially early career women physician-scientists. There is an urgent need for funding agencies, schools of medicine, and academic medical centers to realign their values and investments to address these challenges.

To begin to address this emerging concern, the Department of Medicine has initiated a program to support the careers of early investigators. This program will provide a mechanism of support for Early Career Investigators whose research careers have been affected by Covid-19. The DOM will provide salary support to extend active Mentored Career Development Awards for six months (six months will be added on to the end of an active Career Development Award; <https://medschool.cuanschutz.edu/medicine/research/research-funding/cda-supplemental-support>). These emerging scientists represent an important part of our future, and will benefit from some additional protected time to advance their careers.

We will get over this, but it won’t be easy. For the next couple of months, we’ll have to maintain a delicate balance between a raging

pandemic and the promise of our vaccination program. However, our collective values have proven to be that beacon that will continue to guide us through this storm. I hope that you and your loved ones are faring well. Best wishes for an easy end of the year and renewed hope and strength for the new one. Please send me your concerns and ideas.

David

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