

**From:** [Schwartz, David](#)  
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**Attachments:** [washington....andersen B.1.1.7 preprint.pdf](#)

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Dear Friends and Colleagues.

We've got a lot to be thankful for. The number of Covid cases, hospitalizations, and deaths have decreased and our vaccination programs have been successful. Moreover, our departmental finances are in reasonable shape and I'm hopeful we'll be able to return to our normal approach to raises and bonuses this summer.

Our immediate threat is the potential emergence of another surge as a result of the world-wide spread of the genetic variants of SARS-CoV-2. I've asked Eric Poeschla to make a few comments to address this concern and his comments are summarized below:

- The variants continue to raise concern but do not present an immediate issue for us in Colorado.
- The variant first identified in the U.K. (B.1.1.7) is now established in the U.S. and the absolute numbers as seen by S gene target failures (SGTF, which identify a deletion in B.1.1.7) in standard clinical diagnostic PCR (and by limited whole genome sequencing) are low. However, even as total numbers of SARS-CoV-2 cases fall in the U.S., the *percentage* that are B.1.1.7 are increasing in individual states as expected from the apparent higher transmissibility of this virus. For example, it has been reported that the *percentage* of positive samples that show SGTFs (of which generally more than half turn out to be B.1.1.7 when sequenced) in Florida went from about 1% to about 7-8% since January 1. Attached is a preprint from a first rate group that shows that the transmission rate of B.1.1.7 is increased by 35-45% with a doubling time is 9.8 days, and B.1.1.7 will likely become the dominant variant of SARS-CoV-2 in the U.S.
- The variant identified first in South Africa (B.1.351) is raising concern that it may be less susceptible to pre-existing immunity from natural infection and perhaps to some vaccines, but data are limited still and overall the vaccines are still expected by the most experienced scientists in the field to yield high enough neutralizing antibody titers to be protective.
- This area is changing rapidly and a more clear picture for the U.S. is likely to be available about a month from now. We should remain prepared for the possibility of rising number of cases.

Carlos Franco-Paredes wrote a short, well-written, thoughtful piece on the literature of pandemics (<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/02/05/what-can-we-learn-from-great-literature-of-pandemics-and-pestilences/>). Carlos' essay stimulated me to raise several questions with you that I've been considering for the past several months.

- Given our experience over the past year, what have we learned that can make us that much more impactful professionally and personally?

- What are the structural and functional components of our department that could be changed to enhance our efficiency and effectiveness?
- How can we build on the interdisciplinary relationships that brought us through this crisis?
- How should we realign our values and investments to maximize career development and professional satisfaction?

While there are many more questions to ask, I think it's important for us to begin this debate. Holli Keyser, our director of communication, established a link for you to submit your thoughts, suggestions, and additional questions you'd like us to consider ([CU Department of Medicine Teams Channel Chat](#)). I'd also like to hear from you about the need for a more formal retreat to consider our next steps.

Last week's Town Hall focused on new treatment for those with Covid-19 ("[COVID-19 Treatment: Where Are we Now?](#)"). Lakshmi Chauhan and Steve Johnson led a terrific discussion. Next week on Wednesday (2/10; 7-8pm), we're going to discuss how vaccination of children will impact herd immunity - please join us (<https://ucdenver.zoom.us/j/96282507513?pwd=V3FlbGo0Y0VBcGhoRWlsL2xYSUZQZz09>; meeting ID 962 8250 7513; Passcode 961584). DOM Town Halls are accessible at our website (<https://medschool.cuanschutz.edu/medicine/faculty-affairs/covid-19>). Recent Town Hall include:

- **Dec 2, 2020** "[UCH COVID Command Center "What it is and How it Works"](#)"
- **Dec 10, 2020** "[Vaccine Distribution](#)"
- **Dec 17, 2020** "[Your Charge is Low: How to Manage Pandemic Depletion](#)"
- **Jan 7, 2021** "[COVID-19: What Happened post-Thanksgiving and What's Next?](#)"
- **Jan 13, 2021** "[Implications of Genetic Variants of SARS-CoV-2: A New Pandemic Phase?](#)"
- **Jan 21, 2021** "[COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution: Update on a Work in Progress](#)"
- **Jan 28, 2021:** "[Update on SARS-CoV2-specific antibody therapies for COVID-19](#)"
- **Feb 4, 2021:** "[COVID-19 Treatment: Where Are we Now?](#)"

Thanks for all you've done and all you're doing. While uncertainty remains, uncertainty is part of life and our true test in life is how we respond to complex and challenging situations. My view is that we've done incredibly well over the past year and will continue to meet the challenges ahead. Please let me know if there's anything I can do for you or any other topics you'd like me to address. My very best wishes to you and your families.

David

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