



Washington University in St. Louis

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Dear Faculty, Staff, Fellows, Residents and Students,

Over the last few weeks of this strange new reality, we have received multiple emails in which nurses and medical assistants and other members of our staff ask, “How can we help?” And each time an email like this lands in the inbox it makes everything that is swirling around stop for a precious moment. There is so much going on right now, so many changes and adaptations that have to be managed and new policies that we’re establishing. We are constantly thinking about ways to provide ever more support for clinicians and researchers and students, as well as all of the public health preventive measures and contingency planning we have to address with the city, county, and state. But these moments bring out the essence of what is most important — our people, our team. These are the moments that remind us “Heroes work here.” When people think about our School of Medicine, they tend to picture the doctors, but the truth is that our world-class medical and research institution would be nothing without the nurses, medical assistants and other staff who walk through our doors every morning ready to work. This is even more true now, as we face this enormous new challenge.

If you are a member of our medical staff, you know that although life outside our campus has slowed, our clinics are still open and patients are still in need of care. Many of you – those who work in our oncology and dialysis clinics and emergency department, for example – are doing the same life-saving work you always do. Some of you have redeployed to areas where you are needed, such as COVID-19 testing sites, the occupational health call center, faculty practices and even hospital floors. You are working with new teams and learning new skills and procedures. Your grace and flexibility are exemplary. Others among you have shifted to telehealth, another way of keeping everyone safe by making sure only those who truly need on-site care have to leave their homes. This Monday, we conducted nearly 1,000 telehealth visits, thanks in large part to your efforts. And earlier this week, the nurses and staff of the pediatric critical care unit stood up an adult ICU in St. Louis Children’s Hospital. Those of you who are research nurses are providing needed support for our schoolwide, collaborative effort to better understand COVID-19 and to develop the tools to fight it, with urgency.

If you are a nurse, you know that nurses often have the deepest, most meaningful relationships with patients. You coordinate their care and gain a unique perspective on what they want and need. You are the glue between doctors and patients, and both of those groups will be leaning on you more than ever in the coming weeks. We know many of you aspired to work in health care because you wanted to “help other people” and, from what we have heard from you over the last few weeks, it is so clear that you are working now more than ever with that noble purpose in mind.

We also have received emails from IT professionals, facilities staff and mail couriers that are very moving. We are fairly certain you did not expect to find yourselves on the front lines of a pandemic. You did not expect to feel anxious walking into work every morning, unsure what the day will bring. You did not expect to have to wear a mask at all times just to do your job safely. But still, you continue to show up. You put on your mask and do what you need to do, whatever your role at our hospitals or clinics. And we are so thankful that you do. And each of you plays an equally critical role in ensuring that the important work of these institutions continues. Without you, we would be unsafe in our environments; we would be unable to do the work that must be done.

Yours, along with those working diligently from home, is a quieter heroism, but an essential one and so impactful.

To all of you — our doctors, house staff, nurses and other staff — words cannot adequately express our gratitude for what you are doing. We know that this is new territory, not knowing what to expect each day when you arrive at work and worrying about exposing those you love to a virus we don't yet fully understand. We are in awe of your dedication and your courage.

With grateful hearts,

David H. Perlmutter, MD  
Executive Vice Chancellor for Medical Affairs and Dean

Andrew D. Martin, PhD  
Chancellor