

July 31, 2020

Dear Faculty, Staff, Fellows, Residents and Students,

When I first wrote to you back in March we were in triage mode – planning for the surge, cancelling surgeries, procedures and clinics and suspending research activities. Our campus was preparing for the worst-case scenario, the packed ICUs, patients overflowing into hospital corridors and teeming EDs that we witnessed in New York City and Detroit and other areas hit hardest by the virus early on. The adrenaline was palpable. As I wrote at the time, I was in awe of the way that all of you came together, on campus and virtually, to make sure that we were prepared for whatever the pandemic would bring.

Now, heading into our fifth month of dealing with this virus, we see that while we were prepared for a tsunami, we instead have steady, seeping floodwaters that require a sustained, and exhausting, vigilance. There are still treasured aspects of our professional and personal lives to which we have not been able to return. Our sense of security is fragile as we continue to live with uncertainty, particularly since the demographics of those testing positive seem to be shifting, making it harder for us to know what's ahead. And while we are back to seeing patients in the clinics and re-initiating our research projects, everything we do now requires extra steps and added layers – both literal and figurative – of precaution. It amazes me to see how you have worked as a team, kept your energy up and your focus sharp over this long haul. Because of your hard work, our inpatient and ambulatory activities have nearly reached pre-pandemic levels and the research labs are close to 70-80% operational, a pretty extraordinary development considering that many of those units and clinics were completely shut down just a few weeks ago. We are once again serving the members of the St. Louis community who need our help.

The very welcome good news is that outcomes for our COVID patients have improved as we have learned how best to care for them. There are progressive and remarkable improvements in mortality and length of hospital stay. Our Coronavirus Research Task Force has been working around the clock for months now and we have several exciting research developments poised to make a significant contribution in our region and, perhaps, beyond. Jeff Milbrandt's team at the McDonnell Genome Institute has developed a high capacity, microfluidic viral detection assay that uses saliva samples and a robotic pipeline that will allow for rapid, highly sensitive testing of several thousand per day. His team has started a new company to develop a novel point of care test for detecting SARS Co-V2 along with other respiratory viruses. Two completely different vaccine strategies have been developed by the collaborating teams of Mike Diamond with David Curiel and Sean Whelan with his team and the pre-clinical results in each case are eye-popping. Our educated guess is that multiple vaccine efforts will be needed to conquer the global pandemic. We cannot know if the initial efforts by Oxford, Moderna and Pfizer are going to be effective or sufficient, and so these scientific teams are racing to

contribute. Additionally, under Bill Powderly's leadership, we are participating as a part of the COVID-19 Prevention Network (CoVPN), a newly organized network formed by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) for clinical trials of vaccine and antiviral drug candidates that are ready to enter phase III.

Our progress is encouraging but we still have more of this marathon to run. In the meantime, please know that I see the efforts you are making, particularly those with young children who must solve a number of logistical challenges just to make it to campus or to the home office each day. I see the purpose and commitment that you bring to the mission we serve. On behalf of the leadership of the school and the university and our partner BJC Healthcare, I want to express my deep gratitude and admiration. As ever, I am so honored to know that I am working alongside you, a very special team, in the most challenging of moments.

Sincerely,

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