

Feb. 23, 2022

Dear School of Medicine Community:

I just want to take a moment to thank all of you again. From those of you providing patient care to those in the labs and those working remotely, these past 2 months have been deeply challenging for everyone. We experienced the most intense surge of coronavirus cases yet and it came after we thought the worst was behind us. Most of us had been feeling like we could begin to get back to normal and hoping that the vaccines would sustain that trajectory when this surge appeared quickly and intensely. Everyone was impacted in some way---illness personally or in the family, problems with child care, having to take on extra coverage in the midst of understaffing and then the long weekends and the holidays. It could have been the straw that broke the camel's back but you, the Wash U Medicine community, showed yet again that you are relentless, gritty, determined, adaptable, intelligent, driven, and compassionate. From so much adversity came such enormous goodness.

Although there is so much yet unknown, I am not alone in believing we have emerged from the most difficult part of the crisis. Immunity from natural infection and vaccination in our community has probably reached levels that significantly reduce the population at risk and the likelihood of more surges.

We still have to worry about new variants and we wonder when we will need another booster and how we can protect our loved ones and neighbors who have lower levels of immune function, but there are many signs that we can move forward. We know so much more about how to avoid the infection and how to test for it, and in the next few months we will have more supply of effective antibody treatments and at least two new drugs that appear to be equally or even more effective in preventing severe lung disease for those who get the infection.

Am I sure this will be a turning point? No. And we have many challenges with what will be a long-standing burden of COVID and pandemic-related diseases and how it has changed the clinical environment and all of the conditions in which we work. But I think we have learned some very important lessons over the last two years and I believe that what we have learned can carry us forward and give us reasons to be optimistic.

For one thing, we know even more deeply today than at any point in our lives that we must, and can, help our neighbors even in the most trying of circumstances. This is why we chose our profession, the profession of medicine and health care. For another, we know so much better how to care for each other. What I saw during these surges was how we worked as teams, across departments, specialties,

and disciplines, to meet the needs of our community and how, even with a serious worldwide disruption, we were able to quickly return to our central missions: clinical excellence, education and training, research and promoting the careers of faculty, trainees and staff. We can retain these positive changes for ever-improving our culture and the noble work that we do on this campus and in our community henceforth.

In addition to thanking you, I want to express my hope that this moment will allow us to have some time for healing and once again reaching out to take care of each other.

There are no words good enough to express the depth of appreciation and admiration for the sacrifices that you made to get all of us and our communities to the safest possible place amidst a truly catastrophic challenge.

Sincerely,

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