



Tulane University School of Medicine COVID19 Response Update

12 April 2020

Message from the Dean's Office

Greetings from the Tulane School of Medicine leadership. First, thank you again for all that you are doing for our community and Tulane. These are trying and difficult times, and each of you can and are contributing.

On a daily basis though, I hear or see extraordinary effort and remarkable cheer and grace during this pressure. I also witness the setting aside of egos - to do whatever needs done in the moment - as we come together as a team and fulfill our mission, truly embodying the Tulane motto of "Not For Oneself, But For One's Own".

I also want to mention that I continue to see that our entire community is staying patient, kind, and supportive of each other, even in the most difficult of times. This fills me with immense pride, and I want to encourage each of you to stay safe and keep in touch with your colleagues. Please continue to be forgiving, cheerful, collaborative.

To continue to update to the entire School of Medicine community, below follows a summary of some of the most recent SoM activities, news and changes.

Clinical Services

- The hospitalist services added another team at UMC earlier in the week to help with patient volumes. Both TUHC and UMC have taken on transfers from outside hospitals this past week but the volume of patients has been relatively stable, with rapid testing helping tremendously with disposition.
- The "Convention Center Hospital" has taken dozens of patients but has limitations on which patients they can take, and nursing and group homes right are not

accepting patients back until they have two negative tests (contributing to hospital volume).

- The faculty and residents are extremely grateful for the support received: especially meals and donations of PPE! And they miss having our students up on the clinical wards
- ICU services are broken up into two or more teams at our 3 hospitals. This has been possible only due to the contributions of the Anesthesia & Surgery Departments, as well as the creativity of the residency leadership and the resilience of the house staff.
- ICU beds, and number of CoVID-19 patients on ventilators, are down from their peak. We are seeing fewer admissions from the medicine wards and ED, and more transfers from regional hospitals.
- We have ample beds and ventilators, so as might be expected the limiting factor of greatest concern has been the number of qualified nurses and respiratory therapists. Fortunately the nurses and RTs took extra shifts and we were never short. We owe them a debt of gratitude.
- Venous thromboembolic disease is a real threat with CoVID-19 and we must maintain vigilance in screening for this. In severely ill patients with CoVID-19 infection, s.q. heparin does not appear to offer enough protection against VTE.
- Age and obesity appear to be the greatest factors in portending death in MICU patients with CoVID-19 ARDS.
- Racial disparities in the number of cases and poor outcomes are clearly present and will be addressed by a new state task force
- Surgical cases continue to be prioritized with only emergent cases done, elective cases postponed, and those in between are evaluated on a case by case basis. In development are plans to take care of the deferred elective cases when we can operate again.
- Outpatient video conferencing and tele-conferencing visits for patient assessments are increasing; physicians are easily incorporating this method of patient visits into their care plans. We expect that even after the pandemic, video and phone conferencing will remain
- Availability of rapid SARS-CoV-2 PCR testing to assess patients upon arrival to the hospital has improved triage and management of admissions. This is particularly true downtown in the Emergency Department and at Lakeside for women in labor
- Physicians continue to educate their patients and provide support for any social / emotional issues during this period of isolation.

Education Programs: Medical Students

- The School of Medicine is working in partnership and coordinating with all hospitals in the Downtown Medical Center to provide volunteer, indirect, non-patient-contact opportunities for our students that help support all these institutions.
- The School of Medicine is following the AAMC's guidelines that strongly suggest medical students not be involved in any direct patient care activities at this time.

- Curricular activities have been re-organized so that there are ongoing on-line activities for students at all levels; clinical activities have also had to be re-structured for the coming academic year and will resume no earlier than July.
 - We are anticipating significant changes at a national level to many of the standard processes for medical students: the ability for students to obtain clinical rotations at other institutions, the residency application process, and the timing of licensing exams.
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Education Programs: Graduate Students

- The May 15-16 commencement ceremonies for MS and PhD students have been postponed. All earned degrees will be conferred on May 16. Hold that date, because President Fitts has also announced "TUgether – Connecting the Class of 2020", a uniquely-Tulanian celebration to virtually unite students with their classmates. An in-person ceremony for MS and PhD graduates is planned for the Fall 2020, and details will follow.
 - More than 20 PhD and PSP students have volunteered to help out in the CLIA-certified lab in pathology that is executing the Covid-19 in-house test developed by Drs. Robert Garry (Micro/Immuno), Xiao-Min Yin, and Di Tian (Path/Lab Medicine). This PCR test, based on the one developed at the CDC, can run ~100 tests/day with a 24-h turnaround. [Toni Bell](#) is coordinating the BMS volunteers.
 - The School of Professional Advancement is waiving tuition for an online summer course (EDUC 6110) Foundations of Online Pedagogy and Practice. This opportunity is available for all Tulane PhD students. [Contact Dr. Blake](#) if you want to enroll, and more information is available on the [BMS Website](#).
 - The Department of Psychiatry has opened their stress reduction program for MS and PhD students. This group is restricted to Tulane health care providers and students, and you can join anonymously. Contact [Dr. Blake](#) for the meeting schedule and instructions on how to connect.
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Education Programs: Residents and Fellows

- The residents and fellows continue rising to the occasion to meet expanded clinical needs - this has been inspirational in its own right.
- Week 1 was devoted to building out Covid-only services at all three hospitals. Week 2 was devoted to building out expanded ICU's. Week 3 was devoted to expanding internal medicine front-line services, with the anticipation of a possible surge.
- There are now three tiers of care in each of our major affiliates. The front line is traditional ward services, level two are teams providing care for known Covid-positive patients, and the third line is our ICU teams. Cohorting known Covid-positive patients with designated teams enables those teams to preserve PPE, as

one face-mask/gown can be worn throughout the day.

- Tulane has been granted “Pandemic Emergency Status” from the ACGME. Under this provision, duty-hours and resident well-being regulations are preserved. Specialty-specific regulations, however, are relaxed. This has enabled residents from other programs to contribute, on a volunteer basis, to the internal medicine and critical care services.
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Research Enterprise

- The TUSOM COVID Testing Lab is functional for patient samples and performed more than 100 samples in its first 2 days. We began offering testing to first responders this week
 - Re-sterilization of N95 masks by the Tulane National Primate Research Center is being planned, using vaporized hydrogen peroxide.
 - There is a regular meeting of a COVID-19 research task force to coordinate COVID-19 related studies and to facilitate IRB review. A scientific review of protocols by 1-2 committee members will be submitted to the IRB Chair. All inquiries for potential studies, should be [forwarded to Marla Lampp](#) in the Dean’s office
 - Dr. Chad Roy (Microbiology and Immunology - SoM + Director of Infectious Diseases - Tulane National Primate Research Center), received a grant of \$10.3M over 3 years to develop a non-human primate model to evaluate the most promising vaccines and treatments to combat COVID-19.
 - Our Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) has a total of 84 studies, including 8 new studies (all 8 COVID related), in various stages of work. The Medicine-Cardiology division has offered their clinical research nurse to assist the CTU with these studies.
 - Specific studies of note include:
 - The two Gilead studies of remdesivir in patients with moderate to severe COVID19 symptoms (led by Dr. Dahlene Fusco, Infectious Diseases - currently enrolling)
 - The ClinSeqSer study: a minimal risk observational study of clinical course, virus sequence, and antibody evaluation, on patients confirmed to have COVID-19 (currently enrolling), and
 - The Regeneron study of Sarilumab, a drug currently used for rheumatoid arthritis, for hospitalized patients with COVID-19 (should be up and running this week).
 - If you'd like to stay informed on COVID-19 medical & research developments, [subscribe to Tulane SOM's COVID19 Daily Digest](#).
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Faculty Affairs

- Deadline approaching! COVID-19-related **Tenure Clock Extension Opt-Out Deadline** is May 1, 2020. Please see links to [the policy](#) and [opt-out form](#).
 - Visit [Office of Faculty Affairs Website](#) for key links to resources (including faculty well-being links)
 - Reminder: **Travel restrictions** remain in effect. For questions, contact the Office of Faculty Affairs: [Scott Channell](#) or [Tonette Krousel-Wood MD](#)
 - **Faculty Physician-Scientist Pipeline Program** Applications– April 30th deadline to submit full proposal (deadline extended due to COVID-19). For program-related questions, contact Tonette Krousel-Wood MD. [More details are available.](#)
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Mental Health Resources and Support

- Tulane's [Employee Assistance Program](#) can help provide mental health support.
 - Tulane Residents and Physicians have access to a variety of mental health services, included virtual group support. For more information, please contact the Department of Psychiatry at 504.988.5246.
 - Tulane Campus Health has assembled [resources and guidance](#) around COVID19 and stress.
 - Counseling resources are available for students through [Campus Health CAPS](#).
- [President Fitts](#) provides words of gratitude, support, and encouragement, with special thanks to those stepping up to combat COVID19.
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Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any thoughts, questions or concerns. Tulane has a long history of leadership in Infectious Disease crises, and your expertise, commitment and resilience have been a key part of that strength.

Thanks to each and every one of you for all you have done, and continue to do, for Tulane, our New Orleans community and the World.

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