



Saint Louis University School of Medicine and Vaccine Center Mobilize for COVID-19 Pandemic

by Robert W. Wilmott, MD

The role of medicine is continuously evolving and changing in our world, and for those we serve. Medicine, once a reactionary practice, is becoming a preventative practice. We have developed vaccines, screenings, and prophylactic measures to help us live longer, healthier, and happier lives. Throughout history, medicine and medical professionals have been challenged, and we have turned reactionary responses into preventative practices. In times of trial and times of prosper, medicine continues to move forward, impacting our communities one patient at a time.

We are currently navigating through a critical time with the rapid spread of COVID-19. The medical community is being challenged, stretched thin, and forced to solve problems in new ways for an outbreak we never expected. The team at Saint Louis University Vaccine Center, led by Daniel Hoft, MD, is working diligently to develop antiviral agents. We anticipate that soon, Sarah George, Associate Professor, Infectious Diseases, Allergy, and Immunology, will be starting a COVID-19 therapy trial with a new antiviral agent. Our Saint Louis University Vaccine Center is one of nine federally-funded vaccine centers in the country, with an in-house clinical trial unit.

We look forward to utilizing our clinical trials unit for a potential COVID-19 vaccine trial.

Like all medical schools across the country, we are pivoting daily to keep our faculty, staff, students, trainees, and our community at top of mind during this outbreak. We are experiencing a time of trial, but it's also a time to work together to evolve and adapt to what is going on around us and to take medicine to the next level. We recognize it is time for challenge and growth, and we welcome the opportunity. In just a short time, our teams on campus have come together to solve problems and prepare for an emergency we've never experienced.

Our students have organized babysitting services for our healthcare workers who need childcare to report to work. They

are volunteering in our call centers and the telehealth process. They are taking on documenting faculty and staff who are in quarantine, or otherwise unable to work, so we can keep track of our workforce to avoid a critical workforce shortage. They are volunteering with our Employee Health program to administer virtual COVID-19 phone screenings. They are volunteering at the VA, making spreadsheets of test results, and tracking data. Our students have been a shining example of the mission of Saint Louis University and its Jesuit tradition. Our campus community has adjusted its lives quickly and efficiently to keep our campus and our community safe. Residents are splitting into shifts. The staff is working from home. Physicians are mobilizing and leading teams to cover vulnerable service lines. Despite the challenges, we will learn some lessons, implement some changes, and emerge as better medical professionals on the other side.

Although we face challenges, we are continuing to prosper in many areas. We have many shining moments on the horizon, and I am proud to showcase the Department of Surgery, headed by Sameer Siddiqui, MD, Associate Professor and Interim Chair of Surgery. He is also the director of robotic surgery at Saint Louis University. You will read about what his team is doing with immunotherapy in urologic cancer; breast cancer screenings to detect a malignancy at its earliest stage; the exploration in 3D printing technology to benefit our tiniest patients with craniofacial anomalies; the advancement of robotic technology; and advancement in the development of lymphatic surgery. They are taking their craft to a new level and developing new approaches.

The new SSM Saint Louis University Hospital is still on schedule, and the 316-bed, 802,000 square-foot hospital will open in September 2020. Our patients will experience all-private patient rooms; we will have larger intensive care units, an expanded emergency department, and a new outpatient care center. Additional clinic space will be available for SLUCare physician practices. And finally, the hospital has been designed to provide excellent educational spaces for training. We are excited to have the facilities to educate the caregivers of tomorrow and provide our patients with the technology they deserve.

We are excited about the future and what the ever-changing landscape of medicine will bring us. Evolution in medicine and technique demand up-to-date facilities to serve our patients, advance our doctors, and propel medicine forward; so in the future, when we experience yet another need to grow, we will be ready.

MM



Robert W. Wilmott, MD, and IMMUNO Professor, MSMA member since 2007, is a pediatric pulmonologist, Professor, Dean, and Vice President for Medical Affairs, Saint Louis University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri.

Contact: robert.wilmott@health.slu.edu