



**Transcript of Opening Remarks by Andrew T. Filak Jr., MD, Senior Vice President for Health Affairs and Christian R. Holmes Professor and Dean, College of Medicine**

**Town Hall Meeting**

April 3, 2020

Good morning everyone and welcome to this town hall meeting. I appreciate this opportunity to share information with you as we respond to the coronavirus pandemic and the threat of COVID-19 to our community. First, just a few rules. Please mute your audio and your video. Our format will be one of presentation of information. I will be providing a summary of current UC rules and regulations, a high-level overview of COVID 19 in our community and comments on our three missions: education, research and clinical care. I thank those who submitted questions and if there is time, we may be able to address some questions at the end using the chat function. We are planning to put together an FAQ section on our College of Medicine coronavirus website addressing your questions.

Online with me today are the six senior associate deans and we also have George Smulian available for specific questions about the coronavirus. As this situation has evolved, we realize that there is a need to enhance our communication with all sectors of our College of Medicine community and we are working to do so.

I want to start off by stating how proud I am of the entire University of Cincinnati College of Medicine community. I am grateful for each and every one of you. Your resilience, your cooperation, and your commitment to the care of our community and to one another has been absolutely overwhelming. We have seen medical students create a volunteer corps with activities ranging from delivering groceries and other services to the elderly and others who can't get out, to answering calls on the UC Health hotline, and to babysitting for health care workers so they can attend to patients. Our research faculty responded to the call to provide PPE which is sorely needed to preserve the health of our clinical workforce. Last week I was sitting in my office on a videoconference, and yes, that is a new way of life for all of us, videoconferencing, and I watched one of our researchers deliver PPE. This woman and her young son carried box after box of PPE from their car in the rain and left it outside the dean's suite for pickup by our colleagues at UC Health. Not only have our researchers emptied their labs of PPE, they have also reached out to colleagues and friends in the community to help us out. As you will hear later, there is significant ongoing research activity related to this pandemic. Our clinicians have been outstanding, leading the charge in the war against the coronavirus. Putting themselves in harm's way taking care of patients and providing leadership not only to our hospital system but to the entire region. They have adapted on the fly to models of care, rapidly implementing telehealth

programs to ensure that their patients are taken care of as much as possible. And each and every one of you who has adapted to working remotely, quite possibly at the same time you are home schooling your children, or taking care of family and friends, are also true heroes. As I will repeatedly state, social distancing and personal hygiene are essential to winning this war on the coronavirus.

The College of Medicine is truly indispensable and each of you is indispensable to our success.

For the past few weeks we have been focused almost solely on COVID-19, dealing with the unknown. Our present society was already fast-paced and bombarded with news bits and sound bites and tweets and Instagrams. We are now faced with an overload of information that was changing not only day-by-day but hour-by-hour and sometimes minute-by-minute. And uncertainty leads to confusion and anxiety. As those close to me know, I often state that the worse thing is not knowing. I learned that in dealing with my patients, if I gave them good news it was great, and if I gave them bad news, even though they might be devastated, they could at least know what they were facing and could put a plan together and decide how to deal with it. Uncertainty, however, more likely lead to anxiety and fear. And with the coronavirus pandemic, we still do not have all the answers. Although we have learned a lot, this is a fluid situation and we are still struggling to manage it. Decisions that we make today are made in good faith, but are subject to change depending on many variables.

These are truly unsettling times. They are truly life-altering times and have affected the very fabric of our society. Our response to this pandemic has affected each of us in all so many ways. There is nothing like realizing that you are in a high-risk category based on your age to make you think about mortality as it has done for me. And I miss for now getting to hold and play with my grandchildren and to have my weekly dinners with them. I worry about my 94-year-old father in Jersey City, New Jersey, just across the Hudson River from New York City. And my siblings and I are now planning a virtual 95th birthday celebration in May as we will not be able to travel to be with him. And I worry about my daughter a front-line health care worker in a public hospital in Brooklyn, New York, with a terrible shortage of PPE in a true COVID hot spot. And, I will miss my son's graduation from law school in Spokane, Washington. Like many other events, it has been cancelled. I know that each of you has your own stories as to how this has affected you and your family. It is at times like these that we need to work together to rely upon one another. To be creative and to explore new ways to connect while maintaining our physical distance. It is important that we understand that social distance does not mean social isolation. Now more than ever we need to stay connected and support one another.

A goal for this town hall is to share information with you. I will provide a high-level status of where we are right now with our clinical response to COVID 19. I believe George Smulian is online with us to provide additional comments as needed. I will review current UC and College of Medicine policies and procedures that have been implemented. I will then provide some updates in our missions of education and research with input on the latter from Brett Kissela. If there is time, we will try to answer some questions that you may have.

### **COVID – current status and plans**

There is an increase in COVID cases in our community. As of this morning ODH has listed over 2,900 cases with 800 hospitalizations and 81 deaths. In Hamilton Co we have seen 178 positives, 40 hospitalizations, and two deaths. If you view the dashboard on the ODH website, you can see

the rapid increase that is occurring. The stay at home policy and social distancing are extremely necessary. We need to do everything we can to flatten the curve.

As you may be aware, there are several models that are being developed to predict a surge and we have done significant planning to assess surge capacity as best we can. A current model that we are utilizing indicates that we may need two-and-a-half to three times the number of ICU beds that we have available and one-and-a-half times the number of overall beds. And the surge is anticipated sometime between mid-April to early May.

We are trying to prepare for this as best we can, and it will take a lot of your cooperation. In preparation, we have scaled down routine health care and elective surgery to accommodate the need for additional beds. And, as noted earlier, many of our clinicians have adopted different models of caring for their patients.

Staffing availability is a major concern, especially if our committed and dedicated, medical, nursing, and support staff become ill. And with the possible influx of an increased number of ICU patients requiring ventilatory support, a tiered staffing model has been developed deploying practitioners across specialties where needed and supervised and coordinated by our critical care specialists.

### **PPE remains in short supply**

We're worried about this to protect us as health care providers, to protect you as community members, and to protect our patients. This is a major national problem, everybody in UC Health – in particular, a shout out to Rob Wiehe – is doing their best to obtain the necessary PPE for us to continue in this war.

And in answer to one of the questions that was submitted, there is coordination at several levels. First of all, there is a lot of coordination across UC Health with a strong team being put together doing just that. In addition, there is work through the Health Collaborative and through the Ohio Department of Health. As you may have heard, the Convention Center is being proposed as a temporary hospital to help meet the demands that we anticipate.

And finally, testing remains an issue. The limitations on the availability of testing impair our ability to know the true incidence of the disease in our community. I want to commend Dani Zander our chair of pathology, for the great work that she has done. They're now doing COVID-19 testing a UC Health that will really help. It's unfortunate that the testing equipment is very hard to come by and supplies are still hard to come by.