



SOM *news*

Point of PRIDE



In July 1974, UMSOM faculty members Myron “Mike” M. Levine, MD, DTPH, and the late Richard B. Hornick, MD, MACP, established the Clinical Research Center for Vaccine Development (CRCVD), the precursor of today’s Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health (CVD) at the UMSOM.



DEAN’S MESSAGE

This is the third distribution of this publication since our transition to telework and a limited on-campus presence. It is strange to experience some of our lives’ biggest moments in a virtual world. In March, our Class of 2020 celebrated Match Day from their own homes. Earlier this month, we celebrated their graduation in the same manner. If you missed it, I encourage you to go back and watch the special video celebration, which may help to lift your spirits as you witness the School of Medicine community joining together in this new way: <https://youtu.be/TKgR114Yx4M>. I am truly proud and in awe of the exceptional qualities of this class. While I know we all share the disappointment of not being able to celebrate occasions like these in the way we have always imagined, I also know that nothing can take away from the joy, achievement, and sense of pride that come with these milestones.

As we move into a new season of the year, we remain uncertain of what the rest of the year will look like. We are all experiencing a level of fear, discomfort, and confusion surrounding the future. I have been contemplating something that famed Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti once proclaimed: “One is never afraid of the unknown; one is afraid of the known coming to an end.” While the unknown is unclear, we do hold the power to make clear choices. This notion prompts us to consider how our response to the events unfolding around us truly affects our trajectory and imminent sense of wellbeing. We have already transitioned many aspects of our “known” into a “new normal,” and we can see that it is not all bad. For example, our telehealth initiatives have increased significantly in both quantity and quality. In the span of less than two months, almost 1,000 neurology patients have received telehealth care. With a family medicine departmental telemedicine task force, patients are receiving increasingly optimized care through telemedicine and telephone interactions, yielding as much as a 92.6 percent increase in encounters in only two weeks. Orthopaedic patients are indicating that they greatly appreciate the ease of scheduling, the time saved from having to travel to an appointment, and the opportunity to receive care via a safe and controlled virtual interaction.

What’s on My Mind...



...is the power we hold to control our response in the midst of an uncontrollable situation.

Our research efforts are also increasingly productive, largely including crucial COVID-19-related work upon which our nation and the world are relying. With a 9 percent increase in grant submissions to the National Institutes of Health from this time last year, we have received 5 percent more funding from the NIH. The renowned English poet, John Milton, is credited for giving us the expression of the “silver lining,” with his description of the light of the moon shining from behind a cloud. We at the University of Maryland School of Medicine are not only *finding* the silver linings; we are *creating* them.

While we continue to live, work, discover new ways to be productive and serve the citizens of Maryland and beyond, we do not lose heart and we do not lose our sense of purpose. At the end of the day, I believe we are all doing the best we can in every aspect of this pandemic. Our limitations during this time give us the opportunity to innovate, be creative, and reveal novel solutions we didn’t even know we needed. I encourage each member of our academic medical community to continue forth and let grace prevail. Stay healthy, stay well, and stay motivated.

In the relentless pursuit of excellence, I am
Sincerely Yours,

E. Albert Reece, MD, PhD, MBA
Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs, UM Baltimore
John Z. and Akiko K. Bowers Distinguished Professor and
Dean, University of Maryland School of Medicine

SOMnews is your source for all news and information regarding the University of Maryland School of Medicine, including Clinical Care, Research, Education, Community Outreach, and its Culture Transformation Initiative.

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UMSOM Celebrates Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month

During the month of May, the University of Maryland School of Medicine is celebrating **Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month**, acknowledging the achievements and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders throughout the U.S. With the 2020 theme of “Unite Our Nation by Empowering Equality”, this month-long celebration focuses on diversity, inclusion, and leadership to advance America’s Asian and Pacific Islander communities.

(Continued on page 8)

2020
ASIAN
PACIFIC
AMERICAN
HERITAGE MONTH

A Beloved 'One of a Kind' Colleague

*Longtime UMSOM Medical Education Leader
Remembered for Her Extraordinary
Compassion and Kindness*

Nancy R. Lowitt, MD, EdM, FACP

A longtime University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM) educator and national leader in faculty affairs and professional development, who was known across the UMSOM community for her gentle kindness, collaborative spirit and selfless demeanor, passed away on May 18, 2020.

Dr. Lowitt, who had taken on increasing responsibilities for major UMSOM faculty and organizational management functions over her 22-year tenure, was a nationally recognized expert on medical education and faculty development. In addition to her longstanding professional contributions, she was often described by colleagues across the UMSOM as one of the “kindest, friendliest and most caring people they knew.”

Dr. Lowitt is survived by her husband, **Mark Lowitt, MD**, and their three children. Dr. Mark Lowitt served on the full-time faculty at UMSOM from 1993 to 2004 and is currently Adjunct Associate Professor in the UMSOM Department of Dermatology. He completed his residency in Dermatology at the University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS).

Dr. Lowitt, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Medicine, had recently been promoted to Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs & Professional Development. She was widely recognized for her national leadership and involvement in medical education issues — serving for many years as a member of several committees of the Association of American Colleges (AAC), the American College of Physicians, and the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education. She had been honored by the Daily Record as one of “Maryland’s Top 100 Women.”



Nancy R. Lowitt, MD, EdM, FACP

A Record of Leadership

Dr. Lowitt was recruited to lead UMSOM’s Graduate and Continuing Medical Education programs in 1998. She assumed additional responsibilities for critical administrative areas since then — including faculty affairs, professional faculty development, conflict of interest, and culture transformation.

She had served as Associate Dean for Professional Development, then added Faculty Affairs, and further added her role as Chief Conflict of Interest Officer for the UMSOM in 2014, developing policy consistent with national guidelines and State and Federal law regarding conflict of interest. Earlier this year, Dr. Lowitt led the UMSOM to achieve Accreditation with Commendation from the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education.

Since 2018, Dr. Lowitt had taken the lead in developing and managing the implementation of the Dean’s **Culture Transformation Initiative (CTI)**. Under her leadership, the CTI launched a school-wide program to ensure a diverse, inclusive, and respectful professional environment for everyone at the UMSOM. She then led implementation, in collaboration with UMB and UMMS, of a wide range of activities, programs

and committees dedicated to making both short-term and long-term culture changes that continue to move forward— including policy enactment, professional development, equity in faculty promotions and compensation, and culture/ climate research. 🏛️

“The entire UMSOM community has lost one of its most beloved friends and colleagues. Nancy Lowitt was a School of Medicine ‘Treasure’ — someone who touched every part of our academic mission, and touched the hearts of everyone she met. I will miss her dearly, as one of my most trusted advisors who has served as my Associate Dean throughout my entire term as Dean. She was always eager to take on additional responsibilities in critical areas, assuming leadership roles in faculty affairs, as Chief Conflict of Interest Officer, as inaugural Director of the Culture Transformation Initiative, and as one of the sponsors of the Women in Medicine and Science organization. In each of these roles, she had an extraordinary sense of fairness, empathy, and wisdom that shed new light on the most difficult and challenging situations. She was a trailblazer who always worked tirelessly to ensure equality, diversity, and inclusion in our culture. She was an inspirational role model to our faculty. Most of all, she was one of the most caring, compassionate, and selfless people I have ever met. She leaves a lasting legacy that will never be forgotten. On behalf of our entire community, I want to express my deepest sympathies to Dr. Mark Lowitt and the entire Lowitt family, as we offer our strength and support to them during this difficult time.”

E. Albert Reece, MD, PhD, MBA

Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs, UM Baltimore
The John Z. and Akiko K. Bowers Distinguished Professor
Dean, University of Maryland School of Medicine

“When I initially interviewed Nancy Lowitt for a position in the Dean’s office, I was impressed by her knowledge and poise. I remember thinking that she appeared to be a really nice person — what an understatement. This extremely pleasant person said she would help fix our almost broken graduate and continuing medical education program. Over time, I discovered that Nancy was one of the hardest working, most deeply committed person I knew. More importantly, her priority was always to do her best to support the school, its faculty, and students. As one might say during current times, she was client oriented. I once told Nancy that I wanted the school to provide CME credits for the annual meeting of an organization that I headed. She soon returned with a long application for me to complete, a list of rules and regulations, and the projected cost — all with a pleasant smile on her face. I may have been her boss, but in this case, I was a prospective client — all business. Nancy developed and maintained one of the nation’s premier Graduate CME programs. To Mark Lowitt, another very nice person, and to their children, I and the school will miss Nancy terribly.”

Donald E. Wilson, MD, MACP, AGAF

The John Z. and Akiko K. Bowers Distinguished Professor
and Dean Emeritus
University of Maryland School of Medicine

Condolences from Across the Campus

“I was deeply saddened to hear of Nancy’s passing. She and I worked together for more than 20 years and I came to rely on her for her dedication to medical education, to mentoring women and developing leaders. She was a kind and caring person with a heart of gold, and I will miss her presence at the university.”

Bruce Jarrell, MD, Interim President,
University of Maryland, Baltimore

“Nancy Lowitt was a longtime colleague and collaborator who possessed immense dedication to education, equity and civility. Her always calm and thoughtful approach helped all of us manage many challenging situations with grace. She will be incredibly missed by the institution and by the many friends she has here.”

Donna Parker, MD, FACP, Associate
Professor of Medicine and Senior
Associate Dean of Undergraduate
Medical Education

“Dr. Nancy Lowitt was a transformational leader who accomplished great things in service to our academic mission that she held so dear. She mentored many people with insight and a big heart. She served as a role model for many people, especially for women. She always had time for the individual, always had an open ear, always gave the benefit of the doubt, and always sought and found the best in people. She was a spiritual and values-driven colleague who approached every challenge by asking, ‘What is the right thing to do?’ Nancy defined integrity and her leadership inspired others. Dr. Lowitt’s partnership with UMMC to transform our shared culture is a legacy that will endure. She will be dearly missed, and we extend our deepest sympathies to her family, friends and the colleagues who had the privilege to work with her.”

Mohan Suntha, MD, President and CEO, University of Maryland Medical System, and **Alison Brown, MPH**, Interim President, University of Maryland Medical System and Medical Center

“Nancy was a dear friend and a wonderful colleague. She took on a variety of important tasks, including navigating conflicts of interest issues and mediating interpersonal disputes. She did it all with grace and dedication with the best interest of the School of Medicine as her highest priority. The Culture Transformation Initiative will be her lasting legacy.”

James Kaper, PhD, the James & Carolyn Frenkil Distinguished Dean’s Professor, Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, and Chair, Department of Microbiology & Immunology

“Dr. Lowitt was a warm, family-oriented, calming and loving person. A day didn’t pass without her flashing her beautiful smile and offering encouraging words. We were blessed to have her as part of our lives all these years. She will be missed by all us who were privileged to know her. The Office of Faculty Affairs and Professional Development will truly miss her, and would like to leave these words of remembrance: Your gracious spirit and presence will be an everlasting mark in our lives. We will think of you often and remember your special smile. You will always be in our hearts. Farewell Dr. Lowitt.”

Robertha Simpson, Chanise Reese-Queen, Althea Pusateri, and **Gloria Owens**, Staff of the Office of Faculty Affairs and Professional Development



THE DRIVE FOR A CURE:

UMSOM Researchers Ramp Up Vaccine Testing Through Three New Initiatives

Over the past few weeks, physician-scientists at the University of Maryland School of Medicine have accelerated their research efforts to discover a vaccine that can combat the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. At present, there are no licensed vaccines or therapies for COVID-19, a serious respiratory disease first detected in December 2019 in the Wuhan, Hubei Province in China that has now spread across the globe, resulting in over 100,000 deaths in the U.S. alone.

Unique RNA Vaccine Candidate Testing First in U.S.

In a significant development in the global effort to discover a safe and effective vaccine for COVID-19, researchers at the UMSOM Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health (CVD) have become the first in the U.S. to begin testing experimental COVID-19 vaccine candidates developed by Pfizer and BioNTech. The research, funded by Pfizer Inc., will study the safety, efficacy, and dosing of an experimental mRNA -based vaccine.

The vaccine research is part of a multicenter study in the U.S. and in Germany that will include up to 360 participants in this initial stage. In Baltimore, the clinical trial includes up to 90 healthy adult participants, between 18 and 85 years of age.

“We are excited to begin testing these vaccine candidates against COVID-19. The research is on a fast track given the extreme consequences of this pandemic and the critical need for preventive measures,” said **Kathleen M. Neuzil, MD, MPH, FIDSA**, the Myron M. Levine, MD Professor in Vaccinology, Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics, and Director of the CVD. Dr. Neuzil and **Kirsten Lyke, MD**, Professor of Medicine, are the investigators for the vaccine trial, which is now recruiting and screening for participants. The first participant was vaccinated on May 4.

This so-called BNT162 program is a collection of at least four experimental vaccines, each of which represent a different combination of mRNA formats and target antigens. – mRNA – or messenger RNA – is a long molecule, composed of nucleotides linked in a unique order to convey genetic instructions about how to make proteins. Once mRNA in a vaccine is inside of the body’s cells, it directs the cells to produce protein antigens, which stimulate the immune system of the vaccinated individual, generating immune response to the vaccine antigen. It differs from a traditional vaccine because it does not inject a virus protein into body.

The participants will receive two injections a month apart. The first group to be vaccinated will include healthy adults aged 18 to 55, while the next group will include volunteers aged 65 to 85 years of age. Researchers will investigate different dosages and types of the vaccine candidates to learn which one is best tolerated and produces the strongest immune response.

For individuals interested in participating in this important vaccine trial:

Call – 1 (410) 706-6156

Text – COVID19Vaccine to #555888

Email – clintrial@som.umaryland.edu

Visit – <https://www.medschool.umaryland.edu/cvd/trials/Experimental-COVID-19-Vaccine/>

Testing Experimental Hydroxychloroquine Therapy for COVID-19

UMSOM researchers also are testing the effectiveness of hydroxychloroquine as a therapy to prevent infection and symptoms in individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19-positive individuals. The trial is significant because it focuses on preventing COVID-19 and does not involve individuals who are ill with infection, but rather healthy individuals who have been exposed.

The research is part of a national study being conducted across the COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator, an initiative launched by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), Wellcome, and Mastercard, with funding from an array of public and philanthropic donors, to speed up the response to the COVID-19 pandemic by funding the identification, assessment, development and scale up of treatments.

Principal investigators for the **COVID-19 Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) trial** — which is being conducted remotely among volunteers throughout the Baltimore-Washington area — are Dr. Neuzil and **Miriam Laufer, MD, MPH**, Professor of Pediatrics and Associate Director of the CVD's Malaria Research. *“There are no specific therapeutics approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) with proven effectiveness to treat patients with COVID-19 infection. This trial brings opportunities for our patients at the University of Maryland Medical Center (UMMC) to receive the drug under carefully controlled conditions and provide the critical data needed for licensure of Remdesivir as a COVID-19 treatment by the FDA,”* said Dr. Kotloff, who is the Associate Director for Clinical Research in CVD.

Both Dr. Neuzil and Dr. Laufer are infectious disease specialists, with extensive experience in vaccine and infectious disease research. Dr. Laufer, is a hydroxychloroquine expert, having spent years researching the therapy's effectiveness in children, pregnant women and people living with HIV, as well as the epidemiology of drug-resistant malaria.

This research is part of a larger national study led by the University of Washington. This study is a randomized, multi-center study, enrolling nationwide up to 2,000 men and women who meet the eligibility criteria. For more information, visit www.covid19pepstudy.org.

Remdesivir Tested as Potential Treatment for COVID-Positive Patients

To mitigate the impact of the virus, UMSOM researchers are testing the effectiveness of the investigational antiviral drug Remdesivir in hospitalized adult patients with SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19). The randomized controlled clinical trial is evaluating the safety and effectiveness of the drug, with the goal of providing the critical data needed for licensure of Remdesivir as a COVID-19 treatment by the FDA.

This research, conducted through the UMSOM's Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health (CVD) and the Vaccine and Treatment Evaluation Unit (VTEU), is part of a national study funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). For more than four decades, CVD has operated as part of NIAID's VTEU network, testing vaccines and therapies for a broad range of infectious diseases including influenza, Ebola and Zika. **Karen Kotloff, MD**, Professor of Pediatrics, is the Principal Investigator and **Justin Ortiz, MD**, Associate Professor of Medicine, is Co-Principal Investigator for the current UMSOM clinical trial.



Kathleen Neuzil, MD, MPH, FIDSA



Miriam Laufer, MD, MPH



Karen Kotloff, MD

“A vaccine is urgently needed for COVID-19,” says UMSOM Dean E. Albert Reece, MD, PhD, MBA. “Our infectious disease experts and our vaccine experts at the University of Maryland School of Medicine have decades of experience in developing and testing protections from the leading infectious and emerging diseases. These research efforts are an essential first step in protecting populations around the world from this serious illness.” 

Medical Students Volunteer to Fight Against COVID-19



PHOTO CREDIT: REBECCA FENDERSON

Rebecca Fenderson (MS3) transporting nasopharyngeal swabs from Employee Health Screening Clinic to the lab for testing.

Nearly 200 Medical Students Help to Support Frontline Health Care Workers

With their studies on hold due to the coronavirus outbreak, a growing number of medical students at the University of Maryland School of Medicine have stepped up to assist on the front lines of the pandemic.

“In our response to the pandemic,” says **Nidhi Goel, MD, MHS**, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics and Physician Advisor at the University of Maryland Medical Center. ***“We have faced a lot of challenges in the last several weeks, but our medical student volunteers have been a bright, shining light during this very critical time.”***

In early March, Dr. Noel, along with newly minted physicians **Cara Dooley, MD, Gabriella Miller, MD, and Breanna Tracy, MD**, formed the Medical Student Supplementary Labor Force to support University of Maryland health care workers and patients affected by COVID-19.

“This is not how any of us expected medical school to end,” says Dr. Tracy, who will soon begin a combined internal medicine and ophthalmology residency at the University of Michigan Hospital. ***“Everything ended***



PHOTO CREDIT: KANAMI MORI

Gabriella Miller (MS4), Kanami Mori (MS3), Zach Kim (MS3), Nicole Mair (MS3), and Nick Musacchio (MS3) preparing to fit test employees for N95 respirators.

abruptly, and we all found ourselves with more time to help and wanting to be able to do something positive.”

Dr. Tracy and her colleagues mobilized over 190 medical students, nearly a quarter of the medical student body, to assist with more than 10 task forces — each serving a critical function to support the University of Maryland Medical Center’s response to the pandemic.

“It’s been incredibly heartening,” says Dr. Goel. ***“Our students have taken so much time and energy out of their lives to be a part of this important public health response. They give us hope for the providers of the future.”***



PHOTO CREDIT: KANAMI MORI

Kanami Mori (MS3) and Srikar Abidhatla (MS1) booting up some iPads during a shift with the Clinical Mobility Team. This team provides iPads to COVID-positive and PUI patient rooms to promote communication with patients and staff in the room while preventing unnecessary exposure of staff.

UMSOM Medical Student COVID-19 Support Efforts:

- **Contact Tracing:** In collaboration with the University of Maryland Medical Center's Infection Prevention Team, medical students are actively tracing positive employee and patient index cases.
- **The Clinical Mobility Team:** Students are involved in deploying iPads to patients under investigation (PUI) and COVID-positive patient rooms.
- **Fit Testing:** Student have helped to test over 6000 employees for N95-rated respirators.



Back row: Rebekah Friedrich (employee), Cheyenne Parris (employee), Sami Gurmu (employee). Front row: David Na (MS3), Stephanie Zhang (MS3). Students and employees partner to create some moral-boosting sidewalk art outside of one of the entrances to UMMC Downtown Campus.

- **Employee Serology:** Students have assisted in testing employee blood samples for antibodies to the COVID virus to assess immunity
- **Employee Health Screening Clinic:** Students have transported nasopharyngeal swabs from the Screening Clinic to the lab for testing at University of Maryland Medical Center's Downtown and Midtown campuses.
- **App Development:** Dr. Tracy and her colleagues contributed to creating an app for internal use at the University of Maryland Medical Center to bring together system-wide policy and resources in one easy to access portal.



Matt Schliep (MS3) assembling boxed lunches at a UMMC-sponsored meal distribution for families in need.



Roey Reiss (MS3) transports a device as part of a Clinical Mobility Team, which allocates resources for providers to utilize telehealth in the hospital.

- **Negative Results Calls:** Students have called individuals who have tested negative for COVID-19 to inform them of their status.
- **Donor Plasma Project:** Students have called patients who have recovered from COVID-19 to recruitment for plasma donation.
- **PPE Assembly at BWMC:** Students helped assemble novel Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for safer intubation practices at University of Maryland Baltimore Washington Medical Center.
- **Project Cavalry:** Students partnered with unit managers to collect redeployment information for all staff at University of Maryland Medical Center's Downtown and Midtown campuses.
- **PPE Donning/Doffing:** Student volunteers have trained to assist with donning and removing (doffing) PPE during hospital surges.
- **Meal Distribution:** Students participated in distribution of meals at UMMC-sponsored events.



Harrison Bell (MS3) during a shift assisting the lab with employee serology testing to see what percentage of our employee network has been exposed to COVID-19.



David Na (MS3), Srikar Abidhatla (MS1), Max An (MS3), and Joshua Finkel (MS3) taking a break during their shift with the Clinical Mobility Team.

Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month

Continued from page 1

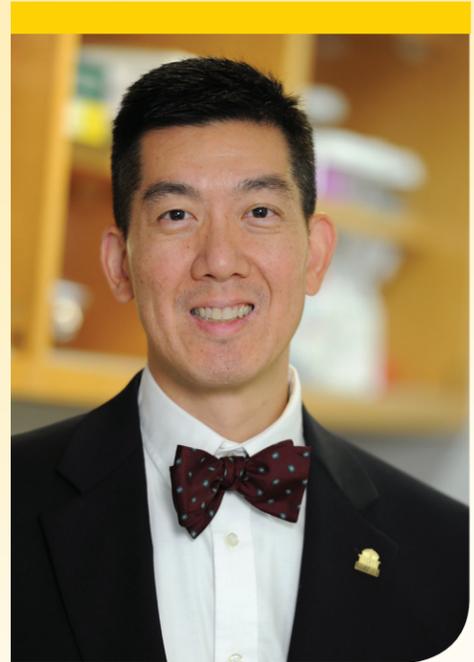
This year's theme is particularly relevant given the recent anti-Asian sentiment faced by some of our co-workers. The entire UMSOM community supports and stands in solidarity with our Asian and Asian-American colleagues.

Among the many Asian and Asian-American professionals who add so much to the UMSOM's accomplishments is **Wilbur H. Chen, MD, MS**, Associate Professor of Medicine. Dr. Chen is an adult infectious disease physician-scientist with a specific interest in clinical vaccinology. He is Chief of the Adult Clinical Studies section within the **Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health** and Director of the UMB Travel Medicine Practice. Dr. Chen also is active investigator within the NIAID-supported Vaccine and Treatment Evaluation Unit (VTEU), composed of nine academic centers throughout the U.S.

In March 2020, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan appointed Dr. Chen as a key member of the Coronavirus Response Team. Also serving on this team is **David Marcozzi, MD**, Associate Professor and Associate Chair of Population Health, UMSOM Department of Emergency Medicine and University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS) COVID-19 Incident Commander. This special panel continues to advise the Governor and top administration officials on important health and emergency management decisions as the pandemic situation in Maryland continues to evolve.

The UMSOM salutes Dr. Chen and our other Asian, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander colleagues who continue to enrich our community!

To learn more about diversity initiatives at the UMSOM, please visit the University of Maryland School of Medicine's Diversity & Inclusion website at <https://www.medschool.umaryland.edu/diversity/>.



Wilbur H. Chen, MD, MS

Please Give to the UM School of Medicine COVID-19 Response Fund

The University of Maryland School of Medicine is committed to combating the unprecedented health challenges brought on by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

As the COVID-19 outbreak continues to impact our state and the world, UMSOM physicians, scientists, and public health professionals are mobilizing to provide high-quality medical care to affected patients while pursuing advanced research to discover new treatments and potential cures.

Your donation of *any* amount will support the innovative care and research that is needed **right now** to confront this global pandemic — and will ensure that UMSOM has the critical resources to remain at the forefront of our nation's COVID-19 response.

Please give today - visit

<https://medschool-umaryland.givecorps.com/projects/52811-school-of-medicine-special-projects-covid-19-response-fund>

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