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Statement on COVID-19 and MCW Research

September, 2020

As have all academic medical centers, the Medical College of Wisconsin has faced an unprecedented challenge presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Limiting the disruption to our robust research programs has been our goal; however, our top priority is the safety and well-being of our people. The Office of Research has been committed to providing up-to-date guidance for clinical and lab researchers throughout the pandemic. Information is updated daily on a dedicated intranet page for our faculty and staff to reference.

Bench Lab Research

At the onset of the pandemic in mid-March, MCW leadership made the difficult decision to hibernate MCW laboratory research effective March 24, 2020. During hibernation, labs were conducting no new studies with only critical operations carried out by minimal staffing. Over the next several months, research leaders carefully monitored the COVID-19 situation and authorized a phased plan to gradually increase lab research activity over time. The initial phase of this plan began on May 4, and additional permissions have been granted over the subsequent months. Although we have not yet returned to a “new normal,” the current phase of the plan outlines permissions and guidance for the present time including:

- Labs permitted to have the PI and up to four persons in the lab at a given time if space can accommodate with regard to physical distancing.
- Animal research permitted.
- Physical distancing of 6 feet or more required with the exception of “[Close Quarters](#)” work, such as a surgical or technical procedure that require two people working side by side, technical training, or observational scenarios that are not effective in a remote scenario. Close Quarters work must follow specific guidelines and best practices.
- Following of [PPE and Safety Guidelines for MCW Research Labs during COVID-19](#).
- Wearing of face coverings and decontamination procedures in all shared/public spaces.
- Participation in surveillance testing for asymptomatic lab research personnel.
- Daily reporting of symptoms when coming to campus to work.

Dry Lab Research

Clinical Research and Human Subject Research (HSR) had been suspended in late March with the exception of critical studies, such as therapeutic trials on life threatening diseases, or in instances where ceasing the study drug could cause immediate and possibly life-threatening risk to subjects. With careful assessment and in cooperation with our clinical partners, the decision was made to gradually permit increased levels of clinical research activity beginning on June 8. Under this phased approach, clinical research has stabilized to the extent that investigators have been able to continue previously suspended studies and initiate some new studies. Though we have not yet reached a “new normal” of clinical research activity, guidelines are in place for the present time including:

- All research activities should include physical distancing when possible, use of face coverings, and frequent hand washing.
- Activities that can be conducted remotely should continue to be conducted remotely.
- Following of [PPE and Safety Guidelines for MCW Clinical Research Personnel during COVID-19](#).

All units within the Office of Research have maintained full operations, including the Human Research Protection Program, Grants & Contracts Office, MCW Libraries, Research Systems, Office of Technology Development, and Radiation Safety Office. This work is being done both on-site and remotely. Review Committees are continuing to meet remotely, including the IRB, IACUC, and Safety Committees.

Our outstanding faculty have pursued and conducted investigation into the novel coronavirus in a wide variety of ways. Physicians and scientists alike have been exploring disease factors and treatments, examining screening and testing, analyzing case data, identifying new ways to support frontline workers, and assessing the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19. Mechanisms have been established to allow investigators to study COVID-19 positive and COVID-19 recovered samples, as well as hospitalized patients.

On behalf of the MCW leadership team, I extend my gratitude for the incredible efforts made by everyone to support each other and the institution during this difficult time. We will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation at a local and national level to maintain a focus on research while ensuring the health and safety of all.

Sincerely,

Ann B. Nattinger, MD, MPH

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