



## **COVID-19-RELATED COMMUNICATIONS WITHIN THE BROWN MEDICAL COMMUNITY**

**DATE: March 20, 2020**

**TO: Division of Biology and Medicine community**

**FROM: Jack A. Elias, MD**

**Senior Vice President for Health Affairs, Dean of Medicine and Biological Sciences**

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For all in the Division of Biology and Medicine community,

During the past few weeks, things have been moving very quickly at Brown, The Warren Alpert Medical School (WAMS), Rhode Island, and the world. I want to thank the students, staff and faculty in the Division of Biology and Medicine (BioMed) for the swift and supportive response to this public health emergency. I have been truly inspired by the leadership and camaraderie that members of our community have demonstrated. I also write to provide updates on the educational, research and administrative changes that have taken place in the Division during this period.

The University has been monitoring the COVID-19 situation closely and making decisions based on information from medical and public health experts, many on our own faculty. In this unprecedented time, President Paxson and Provost Locke have had to make difficult decisions to protect the health and safety of the University community, and I commend the actions they have taken.

For our faculty in the Program in Biology who teach undergraduate students, this has meant quickly moving courses to remote learning. In keeping with the excellence of these faculty and the staff that support them -- and Brown's legendary passion for teaching -- this was done with gusto and commitment. Thank you to our faculty and staff for your tremendous flexibility and profound dedication to our students. A number of emails and messages in Today@Brown have offered help and support for adapting your course content. Please avail yourselves of this assistance.

This past week has seen major changes at WAMS. The first years went on break and are now back learning remotely. The Gateways students will be moving forward using the same remote learning approach. The second years are studying for USMLE Step 1 of the licensing boards, and we are hopeful that they will be able to take that examination once exam sites have reopened.

The biggest changes have taken place in the clinical rotations. At the beginning of the week, clinical rotations were maintained, although direct student contact with COVID-19 patients was avoided. Our students were valued members of these health care teams and were appreciated for their positive contributions in all areas. They were also watching and experiencing the response of our health care system to this public health crisis. However, we made the difficult decision on March 17 to remove our third- and fourth-year students from clinical rotations until, at least, March 31. This was largely based on guidance from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME). Both strongly recommended that all member medical schools pause clinical participation by medical students. Now that students are not rotating, Deans Tunkel, George, and Vrees, and their teams, are working on new educational activities with the Department of Health and new didactic and telemedicine experiences.

Our dedicated students also continue to find other ways to help. More than 100 students signed up when we put a call out for volunteers to help staff the COVID-19 hotline at Lifespan and phone lines at Care New England. They have organized child care, grocery delivery, and other services for our faculty who are working longer hours in our hospitals. I'm incredibly proud of how undaunted our students have been in the face of this pandemic.

Today, we held the first virtual Match Day in the history of WAMS. Our graduating medical students received their residency appointments at noon. Unfortunately, the wonderful celebration that we traditionally hold on Match Day was not able to be undertaken. However, like in years past, this year was a wonderful match for our students. Please join me in congratulating them on their accomplishments and wishing them all the best in their residency and careers.

Major changes have also taken place in the research arena. With great sadness, the decision was made this week by Brown to ramp down our research. I know how difficult it is to pause work one is so passionate about, so I want to thank everyone for cooperating with this necessary action. I particularly want to thank the faculty in BioMed and the graduate students and postdocs who have had to pause and postpone their dreams. Once this crisis has abated, we will return to our labs with renewed energy and focus.

The administrative offices are up and running remotely. BioMed Research Administration, Faculty Administration, BioMed Advancement and all other functions can be reached just as you normally would, only remotely, by email, phone or Zoom. I also want to thank the staff of BioMed Facilities and the Center for Animal Resources and Education who continue to work on site to ensure these critical functions are maintained during this period.

While major changes are underway in almost all areas of BioMed, we have not lost sight of the fact that teaching, research, and patient care are our reasons for being. Thus, I am happy to tell you that we are all working to get back to normal as quickly as we can. We will soon be restarting our departmental-, Center- and Institute-based seminar series via Zoom. We are also working on "Crushing Corona," a virtual seminar series that will be offered. During normal times, BioMed is a wonderful community. Our BioMed community will continue to thrive as we now focus on reestablishing our community online.

As President Paxson recently said, the University will make a decision about Commencement and Reunion by March 27. I want to underscore her statement that it's not a matter of whether, but when, we will all come together to celebrate our graduating students and alums; especially those with milestone reunions. If the ceremony is postponed, please be assured that all students will be awarded their degrees at the usual time so that they can continue on to graduate school, residencies, postdoctoral experiences, and other post-graduation plans.

I'd like to extend sincere gratitude to our clinical faculty who were and are our first line of defense during the pandemic. This is likely going to be one of the biggest challenges many of you will face in your careers. Please know that you have our utmost support and admiration as you navigate through these trying times.

As I write this letter, I do not know what the future holds. However, I do know that the students, faculty and staff have done all that we can do to "flatten the curve." I want to thank everyone for stepping up and adapting to these challenges. I also want to thank the WAMS family for your calls, suggestions, and best wishes. Your support has meant a lot to all of us. I have no doubt that we will get through this together and be stronger because of these shared experiences.

I wish you and your family's safety, health, and happiness. I look forward to the time when we can be reunited as a community in person.

Sincerely,  
Jack A. Elias, MD