

# UT Southwestern Medical Center

## COVID-19 Heroes and Memorial Day

March 4, 2024

To the UT Southwestern Community:

Today, March 4, marks four years since the first positive test result for COVID-19 was reported in Texas. While much has occurred since then, and we've made substantial strides in protecting our community, I know each of us has vivid memories of those early days of the pandemic. The fear of the unknown. A resolve to find answers. And a spirit of togetherness that unified our campus community and helped our patients, and us, maintain hope and confidence that we would meet the challenges in front of us. Our collaboration, perseverance, and support for one another carried us through as weeks grew into months and then years.

As we take a moment to reflect on our progress across all aspects of our institutional mission – education, discovery, and healing – we join health systems and hospitals across the state in the inaugural observance of COVID-19 Heroes and Memorial Day, established by the Texas Legislature in its last regular session. We mourn the nearly 95,000 Texans who lost their lives to COVID-19, and we honor the sacrifices and courage of our colleagues whose heightened compassion and care for our patients made all the difference when so many were isolated from those they love.

Teams across UT Southwestern, Parkland Health, and Children's Health responded to the crisis in unparalleled ways, reflecting our mission by delivering exemplary patient care, finding the means for better diagnosis and treatment of this new infection through research and discovery, and serving as a valuable resource to the public while keeping our campus community safe. The list of heroes is extensive and spans the Health System, Business Affairs, Academic Affairs, and Institutional Advancement.

The challenges of this period, while widely shared, landed especially heavily on groups providing direct care for thousands of COVID-19 patients: nurses, physicians, and advanced practice providers, and especially those within our Department of Emergency Medicine, Divisions of Hospital Medicine, Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, and Infectious Diseases and Geographic Medicine, and our teams in Infection Prevention and Control. Their dedication was truly inspiring.

Residents, fellows, and faculty members from multiple departments volunteered to provide relief in the COVID-19 units. All of them fought through uncertainty and exhaustion to become experts almost overnight in navigating a novel coronavirus that was spreading rapidly. They worked in close coordination with colleagues in Environmental Services, Facilities Management, Supply Chain Management, Occupational Health, Operations, Pharmacy Services, and Public Safety, among others. They were supported, without fail, by partners across campus.

I also note the exceptional efforts by Health System leadership and their teams in leading our region in establishing COVID-19 testing capacity, and later, as vaccines became available, organizing a remarkably effective vaccination program. Because of their efforts, hundreds of thousands of North Texans, including our patients and those within the UT Southwestern community, received the protective benefit of these novel vaccines.

UT Southwestern students left chalk-drawn messages of encouragement outside hospital entrances. And so many others at UTSW and beyond showed solidarity by donating meals and personal protective equipment, sharing messages of gratitude and support, and even providing child care for front-line workers.

I'd also like to thank our technology teams in Information Resources that rapidly made telehealth services and remote work possible. Bioinformatics experts developed a sophisticated forecasting model that accurately predicted COVID-19 patterns in North Texas and served as a valuable guide for policymakers, government officials, businesses, and schools. The COVID-19 Patient Registry provided researchers with important data points to compare and explore risk factors and outcomes. Clinical, data, and basic science researchers dove into COVID-related investigations, and more than 200 projects were up and running within six months of the first confirmed case in Texas.

So, as we mark the first COVID-19 Heroes and Memorial Day, we honor your collective commitment to excellence in finding answers and saving lives. I invite you to [join a live stream](#) of a small gathering hosted by Jonathan Efron, M.D., Executive Vice President for Health System Affairs, today at 11:30 a.m., as we recognize the totality of your efforts. The event will also be recorded.

Thanks to each of you, we have emerged from the pandemic stronger in spirit, practice, and purpose.

Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.  
President  
UT Southwestern Medical Center