A message from Dr. Peter Yellowlees, Chief Wellness Officer

How does it feel to be an 'essential worker'?

It seems incredible that despite being confronted with the most formidable health threat most of us have ever endured, we have been so successful in “flattening the curve.” We are all coming back to work, despite the continuing statewide shelter in place order. Congratulations on a wonderful effort to everyone, to your families, friends and colleagues. We have done a great job at UC Davis and throughout California. It has been an amazing community effort. And it has been highly successful. Well done. Now we move on....

As we enter the next COVID phase and move to discover a “new normal,” most of us share feelings of uncertainty. It is not like winning a ball game and going home with a smile on our faces. We have really only won the first few innings, and we have a hard slog still to go. We are certainly not yet in a position to put the coronavirus behind us. We have to open up the community slowly and carefully. In the same way we will reopen all our services and welcome back our patients, many of whom have deferred health care over the past six weeks and will need us even more than ever. We also need to support each other.

We are opening up earlier than the rest of our community because all of us at UC Davis Health are classified as “essential workers.” I keep hearing that term. Often people use it with ambivalence or a degree of cynicism, which I understand, but which I also question at times.

This crisis has made me think about the term “essential” and how and why does it apply to all of us.
We should all be proud to be classified as essential. It means we have very meaningful and vital roles in our community. Roles that are critical. Roles that are important and indispensable. I have thought a lot about this, as a clinician who is in a high-risk demographic group and has not been personally interacting with COVID positive patients. I was personally very touched by my colleagues in the Department of Psychiatry who, without consulting me, specifically excluded me from clinical rosters in the ED to protect my health. Thank you to all. Despite this exclusion, I am proud to be essential in many other ways, not least in providing care on video for non-COVID patients.

I decided to ask some colleagues about what it feels like to be “essential.” Here are some of their thoughts:

**Sally Easley, RN, ICU:** “In the news, everything is about COVID-19. We've been so lucky here. I told my husband, I said, 'We boxed with COVID-19 and we did really well today. We won this round.' But I'm ready. I'm not scared now. I'm just angry and I'm kind of... I don't know. I'm ready. I'm ready to take my next COVID patient and do the same thing. We can do this.”

**Kristina Spurgeon, MPH, Emergency Manager:** “I am an essential part of the health care workforce, even if I'm not a front-line provider. I can do my part, by doing my job, to support the care the front-line providers are giving to our community. That makes me part of the chain that will get us all through this disaster – together, with each other, and for each other.”

**Joshua Spangler, RN, ICU:** “The first day the donning and doffing processes were modified 3 to 4 times by ID and PPE educator. The testing was in the early clunky phase with prolonged turnaround times and questionable results. The impact on patients and their families cannot be understated. Severely restricted or completely prevented from visiting ill family members….What will we implement to better prepare for future? Will social distancing, masks, and anxiety be the new norm? Only time will tell.”

**Sarah Louie MD, Family Physician:** “This is the first time in my medical career that I have experienced true fear for myself and my family. So much was unknown at the beginning and remains unknown and the concern that my choice of career could affect my loved ones negatively was very real for me. That being said, my love of my profession and being able to use my training and skills to help others at times like these FAR outweighs any fear I have. I feel privileged to be here for my patients and community at this time, no matter the cost.”

**Alexandria DePew, RN, ER:** “It's put a lot of things into perspective, not just as a nurse and in health care, but also just in my life. But being on the front line, I feel like it's been really tough. It's not easy and being fearful of making sure that my family is safe and also knowing that I can't stay home when other people can. I need to come here. I have a commitment to my co-workers and our patients and our institution.”

**Connor Reilly, Project Analyst:** “The only constant has been my work at UC Davis Medical Center. I know that my work continues to drive the UC Davis Health mission. It is sincerely rewarding to stand alongside my front-line colleagues and continue to support essential health care functions for my community.”

**Al Nutt, RN, ICU:** “A lot of it is learning when we get there, okay, what is the policy for this today? I don't want to do what I'm not supposed to do. We are on the code team, and all of the
codes now are also airborne isolation too. Which was huge to try to transition our code process from just standard PPE to airborne isolation.”

**Katren Tyler, MD, Emergency Physician:** “I feel very fortunate and grateful to be able to help others through a profession that is also intellectually stimulating, especially during this pandemic. It has been great that some of the challenges of our work have been more appreciated by the public and we appreciate the support from our peers. I think we all had a lot of fear in mid-March and early April that we could also be facing conditions like New York City and I am particularly grateful that I have not had to experience that in my community.”

**Kelly Hamilton, RN, ICU:** “I'm just trying to stay really grounded and take this time to make sure I’m on my self-care practices. But then also recognize with gratitude that I have a safe home and a safe partner. And I have the financial stability to go garden and take this time to actually invest in my self-care practices.”

What a wonderful set of comments. What an amazing resilient caring committed group of people.

So now we return to work and focus on the “new normal” approach to delivering high-quality care to all our patients. To teach excellently. To do great research. To show real leadership skills. We have learned a lot of things in this difficult time, but perhaps the most important of these is that we have all learned that WE ARE ALL ESSENTIAL. We should all be full of pride that our work is so important. That our community depends on us. That we have such meaningful lives. That we will never forget this time when we found out just how essential we are. And how important that is.

Thank you to everyone for all that you do.

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**UC Davis Medical Group Carmichael Clinic**

“Everyone at this Carmichael Clinic is amazing. From Dr. Beamesderfer & Dr. Arnott, their back staff & assistants, all the way to the front desk ladies, all provide above and beyond,
exceptional service and care.”

**Emergency Pavilion**
“A whole team of 20 health professionals responded instantly on arrival for my daughter's seizure. When she was first conscious again, she said "ow!" because she'd bitten her tongue while seizing, and the care providers responded with appropriate concern for this as well as her safety.”

**Cancer Center Medical Oncology**
“UC Cancer Center has been outstanding.”

**Cardiology ACC**
“The staff was always concerned regarding my welfare. I was well taken [care] of.”

**Dermatology Cannery**
“Everything went well from checking in with the receptionist, to seeing the doctor, to rescheduling my appointment. I would definitely recommend this clinic to everyone else.”