

# COVID-19 Health System Updates

May 18, 2020 Monday

As I wrote at the end of last week, after a dizzying March and April, May has brought us to a less intense state of affairs. We enter a new week, with our Health System and region continuing to see a promising downward trend in new cases of COVID-19. We are now carefully adjusting our focus so that we can attend to our COVID-19 duties as well as to all the patients with other conditions who need us.

While we cannot be certain of what lies ahead, we do know that we are at our strongest when we both offer our support to one another and ask for help when we need it.

As of yesterday afternoon, we had 432 COVID-19-positive patients in our hospitals. That included 107 patients in our ICUs. We had another 117 inpatients under investigation (PUIs).

## **“I Can’t Turn My Brain Off”: PTSD and Burnout Threaten Medical Workers**

That is the title of a [New York Times article](#) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health care workforce. An excerpt:

*On Wednesday, the World Health Organization issued a report about the pandemic’s impact on mental health, highlighting health care workers as vulnerable. Recent studies of medical workers in China, Canada and Italy who treated Covid-19 patients found soaring rates of anxiety, depression and insomnia.*

I hope you will take the time to read this article. It is a reminder that our reactions to working and living through this pandemic can take on many forms. And it is a reminder that we are not alone in our struggles. That is for sure. These are predictable responses to what we have been through. And, by the way, this includes all of us and not just those involved in direct patient care.

If we are honest with ourselves and recognize, even just a little bit, that we are struggling, that can provide the first step to healing. What does struggling look like? It can take on many forms. Some examples include feelings of hopelessness, irritability, and anger; a sense of isolation; difficulty sleeping; poor concentration; increased use of alcohol and other substances; lack of energy or motivation; anxiety; and feelings of betrayal. It can just be feeling “off kilter” and not knowing why.

If you are feeling any of these things, one thing I can say for sure is that you are not alone. We are simply not wired to go through the degree of trauma that we have experienced without being impacted. Not feeling normal is quite normal right now.

And I promise you that this is not permanent. You are not destined to spend the rest of your days feeling this way. In many cases, joining a support group and/or working with a professional will be of enormous benefit. And we have so many resources that you can take advantage of. I hope you will all find a few minutes to [visit](#) and learn about them. They are for all of us.

### **Meet Our COVID-19 Scientists**

A team led by Ania Wajnberg, MD, and Florian Krammer, PhD, has found that more than 99 percent of people who had mild to moderate symptoms of COVID-19 that did not require hospitalization went on to develop antibodies. Dr. Wajnberg says: “While we don’t know for certain whether having antibodies confers immunity at this point, or how long immunity would last, we are very encouraged that even those people who had mild cases of the disease did produce antibodies.” Read more about the research [here](#).

### **More Stories of Strength**

The latest round of [Stories of Strength](#) features courageous transporters; physician assistants who formed an End of Life Companion team; and in the [Recognizing Our Colleagues](#) listing, a busy doctor’s surprise proposal. I hope you will visit the site.

### **Your Questions and Concerns**

As a reminder, our COVID-19 Employee Resources website is [here](#). And you can always email [CovidQuestions@mountsinai.org](mailto:CovidQuestions@mountsinai.org) if you have any other questions or suggestions for us.

### **Final Thought**

On Friday, the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai celebrated the graduation of the class of 2020. I want to both congratulate our new health care colleagues, and echo something Dr. Davis said during the ceremony: Mount Sinai is built on the principle of unity between all of us as caregivers. When we face our hardest, darkest days, our instinct is to come together and push through. Thank you to everyone who has pulled together and worked with kindness and mindfulness toward one another. We could never have come so far, and accomplished so much, without your constant compassion and support for one another.

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