

Dear Ostrow Community:

As we complete week four of our “Safer at Home” social distancing efforts to curb the spread of coronavirus, I hope that you and your loved ones remain healthy and are finding meaningful and enriching ways to fill your free time.

We all know how uncertain times are right now as we continue to wait out an expected peak in COVID-19 cases here in Southern California. I was heartened by the university’s announcement Wednesday to extend paid administrative leave for those of our employees who are unable to work from home. I am certain that gives many of our staff members a reason to breathe a little easier.

For those of our faculty and staff who continue to work tirelessly from the comfort of your “home offices,” thank you. Your efforts throughout this time are critical to ensuring that we are ready to open up our operations, better than ever, once the time comes.

While I am so grateful for all of the continued dedication to Ostrow, I’d like to take this occasion to thank a few teams whose efforts have gone above and beyond.

First, I would like to thank our facilities and shipping & receiving team. This team, including **Marshell Miller-Barber, Silvestre Guzman, Manny Juarez, Dave Hutchings, Jaime Gonzalez** and **Daniel Varela**, continues to report to the Norris Dental Science Center regularly — not only keeping the building in working order but also receiving shipments so that once we’re ready to open, we have all we need on hand.

I would also like to acknowledge our IT & Enterprise staffs, led by **Mike Cassar** and **Ramon Enachescu**, which have been instrumental in ensuring our faculty and staff have all they need to be able to work and teach remotely.

As you might have heard, we recently re-opened our urgent care services at Norris Dental Science Center. Getting set up to provide treatment to individuals who are in pain was no easy feat. To that end, I would like to acknowledge our clinical services team, which has been outstanding in getting the clinic up and running.

Dr. Joyce Galligan helped establish the proper safety protocols to ensure we can provide treatment safely. Under **Gina Jackson**’s lead, our clinical staff members **Norma Vasquez, Erica Rodriguez, Alejandro Renaga, Maria Elena Ocegueda** and **Elvia Carlos** have shown up, ready to help our practitioners treat urgent care patients. **Virginia Guerrero** and **Dr. Ramon Roges** have been handling all the incoming phone calls and helping patients make appointments. **Tom Sirikulbut, Tami Oshiro** and **Chris Camacho** have been hard at work keeping our practitioners well-equipped with the necessary supplies and instruments for patient care. In addition, I am honored to work alongside my colleagues, **Drs. Rafael Roges** and **Winston Chee**, to provide this vital treatment. To all of you: Your dedication and loyalty to helping us treat patients when they need us most truly inspires.

However, this gain of an outstanding emergency clinic and team has forced the loss of my beard. Facial hair and N95 certification are, unfortunately, mutually exclusive. I now have yet another reason to ensure we continue this fight to reopen and get our operation back to “normal” as I would like to have my beard back one day soon. That said, I am proud to know we are making a difference in the lives of our patients.

I would also like to recognize our team of researchers, whose inquisitive natures have not been tamped down by the uncertainty of our times. They all remain dedicated to their scientific investigations, working from afar to continue to push the scientific boundaries of our profession. Your work is appreciated.

Finally, I have been so moved by our student body and their overwhelming desire to help out somehow during this unprecedented crisis. This passion and eagerness to help others in the face of adversity is incredibly noble — and it’s what’s going to make all of our students terrific practitioners in the future.

Given the “Safer at Home” initiative, we are limited in the ways in which we can help. But one effort that has arisen has come from **Dr. Sunny Fereshteh**, who alongside several students, has begun to sew masks for the general public, after the CDC released new guidelines that everyone wear a face covering when in public. The group has distributed instructions for how to construct the masks and is looking for student help. If you would like to join their effort, please reach out to Dr. Fereshteh at fereshte@usc.edu.

Stay safe, stay healthy and Fight On!

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