

## NURSES WEEK

# Covid-19 alters public health discussion

Never before have most of us thought about our neighbor's health as much as our own.

The nation's top nurses mirror our worry, and the pandemic is likely to drive change within their profession, including a possible return to public health nursing.

"Our public health system has been decimated," said Julie Fairman, the Nightingale professor of nursing and director emerita of the Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing at the University of Pennsylvania.

More than a century ago, during the 1918 flu pandemic, the United States had a robust brigade of visiting nurses who saw patients in their homes and figured out community health risks. The move toward specialization in medicine over the last half century shifted the focus — and that meant work in public health surveillance, contact tracing and risks to communities went by the wayside. Today's nurses focus on the patient in front of them and not, largely, the community as a whole.

The Covid-19 disruption ought to trigger a change in thinking, Fairman said, coupled

with the equally daunting public health crisis of the opioid epidemic, which kills, on average, 130 people a day, according to public health statistics.

"It's usually not one factor that makes change, and we have a whole lot of factors that have raised their heads and are showing that our health care system is not getting at all of this," Fairman said.

Passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010 established the Public Health Service to be in charge of containing disease outbreaks. The service was supposed to have a ready reserve component to be ready to deploy in times of crisis. Legislative stumbles have kept it from becoming a reality, but the Covid-19 crisis has provided an impetus: The \$2.2 trillion CARES Act relief package enacted in March provides for \$323 million over five years to train and pay 2,500 reservists.

"Covid-19 is an opportunity now to resurrect public health nursing," said Eileen Sullivan-Marx, dean of the Rory Meyers College of Nursing at New York University and president of the American Academy of

Nursing. Sullivan-Marx said a corps would be attractive to nurses, especially if student loans were forgiven in return for service.

The loss of public health resources is felt when a pandemic strikes, Sullivan-Marx said, and there are few formal connections in the community to facilitate a local response. Nursing experts say the next Future of Nursing report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation — a report was due this year but was delayed because of the pandemic — will likely emphasize public health, but not just because of the impact of the coronavirus and any threat of new viruses. Other problems to tackle include the opioid epidemic and the understanding that poverty and other social determinants play an outsized role in health.

"With all of our therapeutics and treatments, we haven't moved the needle in chronic illnesses, so we are asking what we can do to prevent people from getting these diseases," Fairman said.

*Laura Williams-Tracy is a writer in Charlotte, North Carolina.*

## ONLINE PROGRAMS TAKE ON INCREASED SIGNIFICANCE

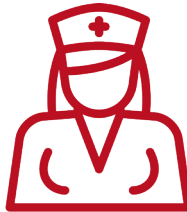
Online education has long been a tool that provides flexibility for nurses who are working to improve their credentials and open themselves up to new opportunities. The medium has taken on even more importance during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In late March, as the scope of the pandemic was being realized, the American Association of Critical-Care

Nurses launched an online course called "Covid-19 Pulmonary, ARDS and Ventilator Resources." More than 170,000 nurses registered for the free class in less than a month.

Megan Brunson, president of the AACN, said "quick bursts" of education that are both substantive and concise are particularly popular for nurses as they navigate clinical scenarios and need just-in-time training.

*—Laura Williams-Tracy*



## STLCC'S NURSING EXPANSION

St. Louis Community College this fall will bring its nursing program to the college's Wildwood campus.

The expansion is part of STLCC's plan to grow the nursing program by 75% across the district through 2024.

When the Wildwood program opens, it is expected to

have 24 students enrolled, which was the case even before the Covid-19 pandemic hit the region, according to District Dean of Allied Health William Hubble.

That doesn't mean the pandemic hasn't affected plans. Hubble said there are challenges fulfilling specific programming with social distancing measures in place.

"Our primary concerns surround clinical training and

conducting in-person labs going into the fall due to Covid-19 mandates," he said.

The Wildwood nursing program will be located on the third floor of the campus with 3,000 square feet of space. It will feature a nursing skills lab, dedicated laboratory, meeting areas, faculty offices and storage.

*—Vince Brennan*



*Paul R. Ross, President*

### Why did SSM Health Foundation – St. Louis start the Urgent Response Fund?

The fund was launched to help patients and providers meet any health crisis that may come to our region, now and in the future. The most immediate need is the COVID-19 virus that has impacted millions around the world and is now affecting our neighbors, friends, and loved ones right here at home.

### How are the funds helping those on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis?

These funds are helping in a variety of ways. We were able to use funds to provide iPads to COVID-19 patients so they could see and communicate with their families. We activated the funds to provide counseling to frontline caregivers who are dealing with the emotions associated with caring for COVID-19 patients. We also purchased hospital-only scrubs for all

frontline providers so that they can change into and out of their scrubs at the hospital. This reduces the risk of bringing the virus outside the hospital and, potentially, home.

### What are you hearing from providers throughout the SSM Health system as they manage this pandemic?

Our frontline caregivers are incredibly dedicated to serving those who are sick. It is remarkable to see their commitment to caring for others. This new virus has also brought about a new level of fear and anxiety for caregivers and their families. Despite this threat, our providers have shown tremendous resolve, resilience, and compassion.

### What does the philanthropic landscape look like during this pandemic? Are people still contributing to causes? Have they pulled back?

While there is widespread concern about the economy, unemployment, and income, there are many who have a strong desire to help. In fact, a recent survey of over 1,800 donors conducted by *Fidelity Charitable Giving* reports that 25% of donors plan to increase their charitable giving and 54% plan to maintain their level of charitable giving in response to this pandemic. We are seeing this with our benefactors and our SSM Health Urgent

Response Fund appeal. One way of giving that is especially popular when current income is unpredictable is a planned gift through one's estate. We are certainly seeing donors step up to make a difference to their communities at this moment in time.

### Why are philanthropic contributions vital to a reenergized economy?

A common perception was that philanthropy was more of a unidirectional endeavor – meaning that when the economy is good, then charitable giving is the beneficiary. However, many donors are understanding that philanthropy can be a significant investment loop that reinforces the economy of a region. Furthermore, investing in health care is an investment in human capital – a vital resource for any community is healthy people. The people of this community are incredibly generous; they know the importance of investing through philanthropy.

### How can people contribute?

To those reading this, thank you for considering a gift. Your support will make a tremendous difference and is greatly appreciated. The easiest way to give is through our website:

[givetossmhealth.org/urgentresponse/](https://givetossmhealth.org/urgentresponse/)

or donations can be mailed to:

**SSM Health Foundation – St. Louis**

12312 Olive Blvd., Suite 100, St. Louis, MO 63141