

COVID 19: Lessons Learned and Hope Ahead

On January 21, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in the United States. The first COVID patient had returned to Seattle from a trip to Wuhan, China. Since then, more than 25 million Americans have been infected, and more than 420,000 have died.

In March of 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Stay at home orders and statewide shutdowns would soon follow.

However, in that same year-long timeframe, a lot has been learned about the virus. From testing and treatment to vaccines and more, the medical community has made tremendous leaps forward.

“I think we’ve learned so much as a medical community since that time, that now we know about treatments like monoclonal antibodies and antiviral medications like Remdesivir. We know when to give steroids and to which patients, to have the best outcome. And we also know to not put people on ventilators early,” explained Dr. Hippler.

And along with treatments available in the United States came two vaccines, produced at a record rate and given emergency use authorization by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It is an incredible feat, considering one year ago, COVID-19 had just entered our country. Dr. Hippler says he sees the vaccine as a light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel, but everyone needs to do their part to make this campaign successful by getting vaccinated.

“It’s not a panacea, it’s not going to work 100% of the time, and it really is critically dependent on enough people getting vaccinated. That’s so critical. But I see it as the light at the end of the tunnel.”

Scientists and care providers are still working hard to better understand both the short- and long-term impacts COVID-19 has on a person’s health. Dr. Hippler believes this continued research will shed light on why the virus impacts people in vastly different ways.

“I think we still have a lot more to learn. I am really looking over the next year or so to better understand why certain people get COVID and are asymptomatic, some have mild disease, some are hospitalized and some die,” remarked Dr. Hippler. “There has to be a reason and I’m convinced that scientific discovery over the years ahead will lead us to a better understanding of this.”

Until we get to that point, Dr. Hippler’s recommendation is to remain vigilant and continue following public health recommendations: get vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine when it is available to you, wash your hands often, wear a mask in public spaces, and practice physical distancing with people outside of your home.

“As we stand here a year later, 400,000 deaths later, and mourn the fact that this pandemic has taken so many parents, grandparents, siblings and even children, we realize that it’s had a huge impact on our society,” reflected Stephen Hippler, M.D., OSF HealthCare chief clinical officer.

As far as knowledge, treatment and prevention, we’re better off than we were a year ago, but we’re not at a point where we can say this is over or that we’ve cured it or we’ve won the battle.”

For more information on COVID-19, including frequently asked questions, visit the OSF HealthCare COVID-19 digital health hub: www.osfhealthcare.org/covid19/.

If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and it is not an emergency, use one of the digital care options offered by OSF. You can connect through Clare, a digital assistant available through the OSF website, or by calling the 24/7 nurse hotline at 833-OSF-KNOW (833-673-5669).