



2020 State of the Campus Address

Delivered via pre-recorded video by Don Elliman, Nov. 18, 2020

Today, I'm coming to you via video to talk about the state of our campus, as we near the end of a truly unparalleled year.

Whoever said, "this year is one for the history books," had never met 2020.

The year has, by all accounts, been a relentless one. One that has presented us with momentous challenges, and fundamentally disrupted nearly every aspect of our work and our lives.

And those challenges aren't over yet.

This has also been a year in which the strength of our community, and the "why" of our work, have shone brightly through the darkness. As we move forward together, it is that strength and shared commitment that will illuminate our path.

Traditionally, we take this opportunity to review in detail the health of our campus and future priorities. But the events of this moment in time force us to first consider our current reality.

Our Mission Matters

There's a saying: "Out of crisis comes clarity."

If we have learned anything from this year - it is this simple truth: Our mission - what each of you do every single day - is more important now than ever before.

Indeed, our dedication to care, healing and hope *matters*.

Our commitment to learning, discovery and collaboration *matters*.

People and families throughout Colorado, the Rocky Mountain West - and beyond - need us. This year has shown us that very clearly.

Reflections on the Past Year

I've also been struck by our immense capacity for innovation and compassion in the face of an ever-shifting "new normal."

COVID-19

March 16. That was the day we announced that all non-critical, non-clinical activities would be shut down, and by March 18 (just 2 days later) we'd be working, teaching and learning remotely. Little did we know then that operational decisions put in place over the span of a few days would be with us through the summer, into the fall and winter, and very likely beyond.

Your response was then, and is today, inspiring...and your persistence invaluable, as we continue to weather this storm.

We fashioned workstations out of our kitchen tables and spare bedrooms, as Zoom became an ever-present factor in all our lives.

We transitioned hundreds of courses online, basically overnight, and we continue to teach remotely and learn remotely.

Our faculty, staff and administrators pivoted rapidly, assembling operational plans to keep us going amid circumstances that seem to be changing by the minute.

Our students volunteered more than 12,000 hours.

When we faced PPE shortages early on, our campus stepped up, contributing masks, gloves and gowns, and organizing supply drives.

Our Occupational Health and Contact Tracing teams have worked tirelessly to investigate every case, intent on preventing spread and containing risk. Special thanks to Ethan Carter, Cody Coburn and their team

Everyone from facilities, our police, budget, finance, student services, communications, human resources, OIT, and so many more behind the scenes have worked beyond capacity to keep us running and running well.

Benefactors have given generously and expressed their support. More than 6,500 individuals and organizations gave us over \$263 million last year alone, including more than \$3 million to coronavirus relief efforts to help those giving of themselves in service to others.

The Colorado School of Public Health, with Dean Jon Samet, MD, MS, and his team, has provided modeling to the governor and his cabinet guiding the state's response to the disease trajectory.

Indeed, our experts are in high demand, sought locally and nationally as trusted voices:

- Michelle Barron, MD, on infectious diseases
- Thomas Campbell, MD, on clinical trials
- Elizabeth Carlton, PhD, MPH, on modeling
- Matthew Wynia, MD, MPH, on ethics
- Glen Mays, PhD, on preparedness
- May Chu, PhD, on masks
- Rich Zane, MD, on emergency medicine
- Rosemary Rochford, PhD, on community spread
- Sean O’Leary, MD, on reopening schools
- Lisa Miller, MD, MSPH, on contact tracing
- Steven Berkowitz, MD, on the growing mental health crisis
- Marc Moss, MD, on caring for the sickest COVID patients
- and so many more

Our research enterprise turned on a dime last spring, under the leadership of Vice Chancellor Tom Flaig, MD, in the first months of his new role. Our research operation was among the first universities to pilot limited return to campus activity starting April 27. Our COVID officials in the research tower and in the education buildings have done an outstanding job and continue to do so. And a team set up a dedicated COVID biobank that today has more than 35,000 samples from patients tested at UHealth University of Colorado Hospital and Children’s Hospital Colorado.

We moved quickly on clinical trials, partnering with UHealth and industry to speed the search for lifesaving treatments, and a safe and effective vaccine. We’ve been part of more than 40 clinical trials and studies including the first large-scale clinical trial of a COVID vaccine in the United States, and multiple trials with pharma and our own faculty focused on patients both in the hospital and in outpatient care.

On the academic side, our students have shown tremendous grit and determination. Our graduates had to celebrate one of the largest milestones of their lives virtually this year. While our newest class of future leaders has just begun the journey toward their degrees amid ever-changing circumstances.

Students: we are incredibly proud of your drive and resilience. These experiences are no doubt preparing you well for careers of service and health and healing.

We have done all this - and we *continue* to do *all* this - while balancing changes in plans, shifting schedules, uncertainty around our kids’ schooling, disconnection from family and friends, and our own anxieties and fears.

As the pandemic has taken a toll on our mental health and well-being, the Department of Psychiatry expanded programming to meet that demand, launching a Well-Being Support Line,

a Faculty and Staff Mental Health Clinic, a Virtual Student and Resident Mental Health Clinic, support groups, clinical services, and more. We know the need will only grow as this pandemic evolves, and in the aftermath of COVID-19 as we seek to reshape our disrupted lives.

Last and certainly not least, our clinical faculty and the hospital staffs have sacrificed everything in the face of a novel disease, caring for a substantial number of our state's COVID patients, and returning Coloradans to their families and their homes - even while themselves often forced to stay apart from their own.

On top of this, they attended to 2 million patient visits for a host of care needs beyond COVID, many via telehealth, which ballooned from 400 virtual visits per month before COVID to nearly 28,000 in August alone. Telehealth is here to stay.

Children's Hospital Colorado, and especially UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital, have been at the very core of this. Their recent rankings are a testament to the quality of the care delivered. We are grateful for their partnership as we steady ourselves for another wave of COVID-19 that promises to hit us as hard - or harder - than before.

And, while our campus is a place of healing, too many lives have been cut short due to this virus, right here among our community and around the world.

As we prepare ourselves for what is to come, know that your sacrifice and hard work in the face of this historic health crisis have not gone unnoticed. You have transformed the way we do things in ways both obvious and in ways yet to be seen.

Indeed, you have bolstered our ability to fight this pandemic with dedication, fortitude and resolve.

And while we work to manage the COVID crisis, there are other crises we are confronting.

Societal Tension, Racism & Inequities

As you worked to make our communities healthier, societal tensions have grown more turbulent. And deeply entrenched racism and longstanding inequities have risen to the fore.

May 25. George Floyd was brutally killed in Minneapolis, while being arrested at a corner store.

8 minutes and 46 seconds. That was all it took for a white police officer to end the life of a father and friend, who would have turned 47 last month.

Here in Aurora, Elijah McClain's August 2019 death has galvanized our local community into action, and spurred calls for justice and accountability.

For me, these events have given rise to somber reflection and deepened commitment to effecting change.

Black Lives Matter. We must do better. That much is clear.

We are taking action, and there is much more to do.

In July, we appointed Regina Richards, PhD, MSW, as Associate Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Community Engagement. She and her team are unifying our pipeline programs, to reach people of color with an interest in health and medicine at young ages; collaborating with undocumented student services to ensure our practices are inclusive of everyone, regardless of citizenship status; and examining our policies to remove barriers to access and equity.

A new campuswide Center for Health Equity is in planning with the Aurora Health Commons. It will deepen our ability to address social determinants of health, and help eliminate disparities in healthcare.

And we have made diversity, equity and inclusion a central priority for our new strategic planning effort.

A Country Divided

And on top of it all, we've had politics to contend with.

Legendary journalist Sam Donaldson said of our country, just before the election, "I don't think it's been this divided since the Civil War." I fear he's right.

Our country chose a new direction for its future on **November 3**.

No matter where you align politically, this year's election was - in a word - fraught.

Our nation finds itself at a crossroads.

What does this mean for us? Our role as an academic medical campus is to be a voice for *science*, and for *leadership* in medicine and in healthcare. I would argue we can also be leaders in civility and citizenship.

What's Next?

So where do we go from here?

To be honest, we don't know all the answers to that question. The 5-year plan is focused on the next 6 months.

Our number one priority is to stay open, if we possibly can. Let me repeat: our number one priority is to stay open, to avoid the shutdown in critical on-site education and, especially, in research.

As I said earlier, you have done an outstanding job so far in sustaining our research and education efforts in the face of COVID, and our hope is that this performance will provide the evidence we may need to be deemed "essential" and stay the course.

To do that, we need your continued vigilance.

This isn't to say we aren't thinking and planning beyond the pandemic, we are. Indeed, we are continuing to move forward in significant ways in each of our mission areas.

In education:

- The School of Medicine's new branch campus at Colorado State University in Fort Collins welcomed 11 third-year med students in June.
- The School of Dental Medicine was among the first to return to limited hands-on learning, and they continue to lead in the use of technology.
- The CU College of Nursing is expanding to meet the rapidly growing need for skilled nurse leaders throughout our country.
- COVID-19 has elevated the visibility of the Colorado School of Public Health.
- Our pharmacy students are preparing for a healthcare environment in which they're increasingly at the front lines.
- And our reputation is evident in increasing NIH funding for graduate and postdoctoral training.

In clinical care and community:

- Our initiatives in Aurora and surrounding neighborhoods are contributing to a healthier community. These include a new Salud Family Health Center clinic providing medical, dental, pharmacy and behavioral health to a population where more than half of the 45,000 residents live at or below twice the federal poverty level.

In research and innovation:

- We are building from a position of strength. Our sponsored research was up more than 8% last year to \$599 million, with the NIH portion up even more - nearly 17%.

- Word is out about our reputation as a destination for discovery and innovation. We are now #20 among the top 100 universities in the world for U.S. patents, up from #53, and more than 600 companies have engaged with us in just the last 3 years.
- Projects with untold potential are being developed from start to finish right on our campus. CU Innovations is a force that is a major factor in driving us forward.
- The Colorado Center for Personalized Medicine has become one of the largest health data warehouses in the country. Recent agreements with Regeneron Pharmaceuticals and BC Platforms will enable us to scale up recruitment and harness diverse patient data, ultimately leading to better outcomes.
- And a new initiative I'm thrilled about - AB Nexus - is a 3-year, \$3 million investment by CU President Mark Kennedy, our campus and CU Boulder to strengthen existing research collaborations and spur new ones between our two campuses. In our first round, 82 multidisciplinary teams applied, and we'll announce awards soon.

We continue to expand our campus footprint, with plenty of room to grow.

- We celebrated the topping off of the 7-story Anschutz Health Sciences Building in the fall, and that landmark facility will open up countless possibilities for our campus community.
- Bioscience 3 opened this year - the latest facility on the 125-acre Fitzsimons Innovation Community north of the campus. The building will help foster a culture of creativity and strengthen ties with innovators in industry

This is considerable progress, and you've been integral to every piece of that success. You also have an important seat at the table as we look to what's next. Our strategic planning process, led by Laura Borgelt, PharmD, MBA, is well underway.

But right here, right now, the focus is on dealing with the present... in research... in education... and, especially, in caring for those most affected by this disease.

A vaccine may well be on the horizon, we can only hope it is, but it is clear that the burden of the next few months will be profound. We will need to help each other more than ever before. Our mental health and resilience are being tested, and will require support by us as a whole and by each of us individually.

Our Mission Matters

As I said at the beginning, this year has challenged us in more ways than we could have imagined. It will continue to.

You have risen to those challenges. You will continue to.

I repeat what I said a few moments ago: out of crisis comes clarity. It has never been clearer to all of us that what we do here matters.

Our mission is more important now than ever before.

It is as simple, and as complicated, as that.

Before I leave you with a short video, next week is Thanksgiving and, in spite of all we are dealing with, I believe we have much to be thankful for. I hope you take care, and have a safe holiday.

Now, please stay for a story that, far better than I can, illustrates the "why" of what we do at the CU Anschutz Medical Campus every day.

[VIDEO: "Why We Do What We Do: The Carver Family Story"](#)