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COVID-19 COLLABORATIONS — Team Decon (decontamination of PPE) — Justin White, MBA, director of Presidential Initiatives. West Texas 3D COVID Relief Consortium — Simon Williams, Ph.D., Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Viral Transport Medium — Eric MacLaughlin, Pharm.D., chair of Pharmacy Practice; Mikala Conaster, Pharm.D., assistant professor; Urich Bickel, M.D., professor and associate dean of Sciences, all from the Jerry H. Hodge School of Pharmacy. TTUHSC Interim President and Provost Dr. Lori Rice-Spearman.

I think a lot of us have stopped watching the news because there are so many negative things on it. Have these wonderful efforts been covered so that our communities can see and be proud of our community and state efforts?

LRS: Yes, our External Relations team has done a great job of working with all of these folks to get the good word out. I know that both Simon and Eric have done multiple interviews and with Facebook Live and now this Town Hall, as well as social media. So, we are telling the story, because we do believe this is a good new coming out of our university.

How many TTUHSC employees do you expect to get COVID once we return to campus and asymptomatic carriers will be on campuses well?

LRS: We're asking and wondering that same question ourselves. We're watching daily, all of the data that's coming in on the number of individuals that are testing positive and the number that are recovered. We think this next week is going to be a critical time in all of our communities with the lessening of restrictions, and so we'll all be watching that carefully together.

Where is the funding (for these collaborations) coming from?

SW: Yes, so we fund everything through crowdsourcing. We have a website, and we have raised, to date, about $50,000. We make sure that everything we give is pro bono; we don't charge for anything we produce. One of the things we've noticed is some of the commercial sources are coming online, a little bit more. So this is allowing us to even move on to make sure that we're using the donated money in ways that provide the most impact. We did begin with a small bit of support from the Office of the President, who funded one of our first purchases of facial material. I'll also give Under Armour a shout out; TTU Athletics reached out to Under Armour, and so they provide us with a lot of the headbands for the face shields. So, I think some people like the fact that they have this pretty cool face shield with an Under Armour headband. Exxon Mobil also came through and gave us a bunch of plastic sheets, so we have had some commercial partners who have donated products to us.

LRS: Yes, we are grateful to our community donors and to the companies that have stepped forward and said, 'Hey we heard y'all might need this.' I know folks have driven across the state of Texas and met each other to transport materials to get them to the people that were needed, so it really is a phenomenal effort.

EM: So, we're being funded actually by the individual hospitals and the state, based on how many of the vials they want. I think folks have heard horror stories about, you know, paying five or 10 times the average going market value of what something might cost; we calculate a labor charge and our cost for materials and came up with a cost per vial. And based our charges on that. We are not out to gouge or make a bunch of money on this; basically, we just want to make sure to cover our costs so the university and my department in the school isn't footing the bill. There are funding sources out there, and hospitals have the budgets; obviously FEMA, the federal government, has poured a lot of money into this as well as the state.
JW: Also, on our N-95 mask decontamination, we’ve identified a source from the Chancellor’s Council funds, and again this is all donated money, not particularly for this particular purpose but donated money to use at the discretion of the president’s office.

Are there plans in place to reach out to other states or high impact areas to help them to create their own collaborations as well?
EM: Oh, well I got a direct message from someone in the Bahamas on how to make the viral transport medium. I think it was through a Facebook post. So, we sent some information on how we make it. We also have a webinar that we've shared, and it can be broadly shared with whoever. Again, these are ingredients that I think are readily available. If you've got some skill and expertise, the right lab space, and if you've got the folks that know how to do sterile products preparations like Mikala and her crew, it can easily be done.

UB: I had contact with a previous colleague at Chapman University now in California, and they are exploring starting a lab. And I know from looking in the media, there are a few folks up in the northeast, like, University of Massachusetts, that started doing what we do about the same time. So, we are hoping that many states, or at least in Texas, that many sites will spring up and do this. It's not rocket science. You just have to take the initiative, get the people together, and organize to scale up a lab.

LRS: So Justin, has anybody reached out outside of the state of Texas regarding the hydrogen peroxide decontamination?
JW: No, not yet — at least not of outside the state. I've had numerous requests inside as far away as Houston. So, we actually know we offer an option. For our local communities here in West Texas, we're able to do these twice a week so the turnaround is very quick, probably much more quickly than shipping them off to one of these sites that they've set up and then having to wait, you know, weeks to get your mask back. So again, we're happy to do this — even if it is just for West Texas, or our region.