

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**CITY COUNCIL BRIEFING BY UF HEALTH JACKSONVILLE**

**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

**Remote meeting via teleconference**

**May 14, 2020**

**10:00 a.m.**

**Location:** Remote meeting via teleconference

**In attendance:**

Council Member Scott Wilson (other council members may have been listening on the call but did not identify themselves as present)

**Also**: Dr. Leon Haley and Aaron Bean - UF Health Jacksonville; Mayor Charlie Latham – Jacksonville Beach; Mayor Ellen Glasser – Atlantic Beach; Mayor Elaine Brown – Neptune Beach; State Senator Audrey Gibson; State Representative Cord Byrd; School Board Member Lori Hershey; Dr. Diana Green – School Superintendent; Mike Bruno – Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office; Jeff Clements – Council Research Division

**Meeting Convened**: 10:01 a.m.

Dr. Leon Haley, CEO of UF Health Jacksonville, welcomed everyone to the call and welcomed questions after his presentation. He said UF Health has had its incident command center in operation for 73 days, starting well before COVID-19 reached Florida, and meets every morning to analyze the latest situation. Jacksonville’s medical community has had great collaboration throughout this emergency. He said that the hospital’s response to COVID-19 will have 3 phases: 1) flatten, 2) fight, 3) future.

Flatten phase: slow or stop the increase in cases and hospitalizations; COVID-19 is extremely transmissible from person to person so extreme measures to limit exposure are needed; UF Health has had over 40 cases of COVID – mostly men, mostly over age 65 but as young as age 21 and as old as 101; 65% African American, reflecting the health disparities in the US. Only 2 deaths from COVID have occurred at UF Health. They have gone out into the community with over 2,000 test kits to bring tests to those who needed them and have seen a very low positive rate among the 1400+ tests administered, which is very encouraging. UF Health currently has about 16,000 testing kits on hand.

Fight phase: safely re-opening normal operations in the hospital, clinics, elective procedures, etc. to address the backlog in delayed health care. Everyone must be tested for COVID before they come into the buildings for any procedure or consultation. UF Health is communicating with everyone who had a procedure or appointment cancelled to invite them back now that normal service is resuming. The medical center did not furlough or lay off and employees, but do need to get back to normal operations; employees pulled out of normal duties to address COVID response have been released back to their usual jobs. Pre-COVID, UF Health did about 30 telehealth visits per day; at the peak they were doing over 10,000 a day; now it’s about 600 per day. Payers don’t pay well for telehealth and prefer face-to-face care - that will need re-evaluation in the future as telehealth becomes more commonplace. The federal CARES Act provided funds to deal with daily liquidity issues – a $13 million non-repayable grant and Medicare advance payments of $71 million which does require repayment, which should be no problem as long as there’s not another COVID spike. The hospital has plenty of personal protective equipment on hand for both staff and patients who are asked to wear masks at all times in the facilities. UF Health is working with the City on the Mayor’s COVID Task Force to provide the best medical advice on City reopening decisions. More testing is needed community-wide.

Future phase: starting up initiatives that were in the planning phase but put on hold. A partnership with Flagler Health to the south was just announced this week. Planning is beginning for a second building at UF Health’s North Campus near Jacksonville International Airport. Downtown campus revitalization projects are underway, including planning for more campus parking. The medical school is developing a longer-term residency program for third and fourth year UF medical students to spend full years in Jacksonville rather than a few months.

This is National Hospital Week, which is being celebrated in a different way in this unusual time. Last week was National Nurses Week. Dr. Haley urged everyone to help keep flattening the curve to prevent any new spikes, especially wearing masks everywhere all the time in public. He also noted that this year is the 150th year of a public hospital in Jacksonville, in various forms.

Questions & Answers

State Senator Audrey Gibson felt that there’s not enough messaging about the importance of wearing masks – she sees too many people not wearing them in public so they’re not getting the message. She asked if UF Health’s testing numbers are included in the City’s reported totals and asked what percentage of the City’s overall population needs to be tested to know the real status of infection in the city. Dr. Haley said that all testing results are included in the Mayor’s reported tallies. The City is trying to triple the rate of testing to reach 5,000 per day; ideally you would test everyone but realistically you need to get to 20-30% of the whole community and trace all positive cases. Antibody testing is now available but it’s a simple yes/no test, so don’t know what a positive result means because we don’t know enough about COVID and what exposure and antibodies mean.

School Superintendent Diana Green said that Duval County Schools is one of the largest employers in the city and asked what was recommended for testing over 13,000 employees and over 120,000 students before schools re-open. Dr. Haley suggested basic screening for health conditions and potential exposure, but testing is impractical because conditions can change from day to day. He doesn’t think testing everyone is practical, but anyone who has any signs or symptoms should be tested.

State Representative Cord Byrd asked about any evidence of people who suffered ill health effects or death from delaying treatment due to COVID fear. Dr. Haley said he’s sure it’s happened – their Emergency Room volume went down 40%, so surely some people didn’t come in for treatment of serious health issues because of fear of COVID-19.

A question was posed about interns at the hospital. Dr. Haley said that all interns (who are medical school graduates) are on the job and learning a lot. Medical students were moved out of the hospital and will be doing on-line learning beginning in June.

COVID-19 is here to stay, hopefully as a manageable disease. Masks and social distancing are very important for the time being to keep the transmission of the disease under control.

Aaron Bean invited anyone interested to contact him to arrange hospital tours or to learn more about UF Health’s operations and impact on the community.

**Meeting adjourned:** 10:41 a.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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