

Spotlights: COVID-19 Response

Matthew Witkowski, PhD, Aifantis Lab, and Justin Snow, MD, Cytopathology

Getting Out Your Comfortable Zone: Research Trainee & Clinical Fellow Volunteer in Testing Effort and COVID-19 Tisch Division

How did you find yourself in this volunteering opportunity?

MW: I joined the team of volunteers for the test validation effort put together by Dr. Matjia Snuderl, since the first step of this emergency.

JS: I had been wanting to assist wherever needed in light of the impact COVID-19 was having on all of us and received an email from NYU leadership regarding possible deployments. I entered my name and was later notified by Internal Medicine leadership that a volunteer was needed.

Where do you volunteer and what do you do?

MW: I am part of the COVID-19 Roche Cobas testing team run by Jared Pinnell and Dana Warfield in Tisch Hospital. Here, our Pathology lab receives the nasal swab samples from predominantly frontline healthcare workers and symptomatic patients. We then process the samples in a tissue culture hood to allow the Roche Cobas to detect the presence of viral nucleic acid in each sample. This machine is capable of running 94 patient samples per run, and we have achieved up to ten runs per day. Here, we know if the patient has the virus at the point of testing – the information is quickly released to medical professionals following analysis. This keeps our frontline workers informed of their health status as well as the potential of infection from their patients.

JS: I was stationed on a COVID positive floor in Tisch on the evening shift helping out with patients who have predominantly cardiology needs: many needing continuous telemetry, their typical blood pressure and rhythm medications, in addition to monitoring respiratory status from their underlying conditions and COVID-19.

How you would define your volunteering experience?

MW: This experience has been a real joy for me during an uncertain time as I've worked with some of the



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kindest people I'll likely ever meet. Jinhee Kim, who directly supervises myself and many other volunteers, works tirelessly and is incredibly kind – she is really the heartbeat of the lab. There are also many people in the team that should be mentioned including Mandi Wen, Natasa Nikolovska, Alexandria Hammond, Justin Mastroianni, Tonia Zangari, Letitia Thompson and many others!”

JS: As a Pathologist, I was definitely out of my realm of comfort, but the Internal Medicine team was incredible to work with and was there at every moment of hesitation or need for clarification. I mainly acted in the role of an Intern and followed the orders provided by the team attendings and consultants while staying on top of labs, vital signs, and placing orders as needed.



Left to Right: Douglas Allison, Letitia Thompson, Mandisa Wen, Jared Pinnell, Natasa Nikolovska, Matt Witkowski and Jinhee Kim. Photo by Mandisa Wen.