

To the UW Medicine Community,

The weather has turned again. We shifted from 80 degrees and smoky skies of October to the familiar rain and wind of November in the Pacific Northwest interspersed with days of crisp clear skies. The change of the seasons has been one of the few familiar passages of time over the pandemic as so many of our rhythms of life have been disturbed.

This shift from summer into autumn has felt different to me. As I walked out of the Health Sciences Building recently, I noticed the packed Burke-Gilman Trail and students, staff, and faculty hustling around campus and the medical center. It felt like a return to, or arrival at, whatever this "new normal" might be as we live through life with COVID-19 in our world.

It struck me how distant my memories of those early days of the pandemic felt. I remember biking through deserted streets on my way to campus and, once there, walking through empty corridors. The pandemic has left its mark on all of us in various ways — through directly experiencing and witnessing loss, to the disruptions in the schooling and care for folks in our lives, to the on-going cascading impacts across industries on our workforce. But it feels like we have travelled a great distance from the uncertainty of those early days and the palpable fear of the unknown.

How do we make sense of this time? As I headed home across the crowded campus, I started doing some math and realized that we have just passed the 1,000-day mark since the first patient who tested positive for SARS CoV-2 was identified in Washington State — and we are days away from hitting the 1,000-day mark since our first collective loss of a life to COVID-19 in our community, which also marked the first known death due to COVID-19 in the United States.

For 1,000 days, we "stayed home to stay healthy." We "socially distanced" only to realize that our social connections are among the most important things that sustain us. We learned that we can still make tremendous connections through masks and across a 6-foot gap. After navigating holidays separated from family, friends, and many of our traditions, 700 days ago we started vaccinating members of our community. We slowly reopened. I got to hug my parents. But then we endured Delta, then Omicron. And now, we are here with another holiday season on the horizon.

I am hopeful that this one will feel different too — for many of us it will be a chance to break bread and share [soup](#) while closing the distance between us. Some of us may find our ways to crowded tables and that will feel closer to normal. At the same time, for many members of our community, the risks to their health persist and it will be important to keep some distance and hold on to the precautions that have kept each other safe.

Over the last 1,000 days, I have been in awe of the work of my colleagues and friends

within UW Medicine. I have felt so fortunate to be a part of our response to COVID-19. In some ways, I know that this moment and the challenges on the horizon will be among the hardest we will face. We are working to solve a difficult equation of taking care of our most important resource — our people — while making our future sustainable. There are no easy solutions to this equation, but the way forward will come from the creativity and diversity of our people working together.

With deep gratitude,

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