Leading our Learners – Faculty educators as leaders in a time of crisis

Unprecedented and extraordinary times are upon us. For many, our faculty have taken on unprecedented roles in the wake of COVID-19. It is a time that requires a variety of new and unfamiliar responsibilities and skill sets, including, but not limited to, teaching exclusively online. These challenges are real, significant, and unavoidable.

In what has been referred to as “the great pause,” personal and professional challenges have heightened. In my recent conversation with Dean Shari Whicker, she noted how faculty have had to pivot since the beginning of the pandemic, teaching online and taking on new responsibilities. She reflected that the pandemic has impacted our training and faculty leadership in ways we could not have anticipated.

In particular, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Commonwealth of Virginia’s ability to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic has been critically important. VDH joined the Virginia Reserve Corps in June 2020 and has successfully trained over 1,000 COVID-19 contact tracers, including VTCSOM students and faculty.

To coordinate this massive effort, VTCSOM students, faculty, and staff have partnered with the VDH. In May 2020, VTCSOM released a brief COVID-19 training module, which was followed by a full-length module, designed and developed in partnership with the VDH. Participants who complete the module are eligible to join the VDH’s Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) as contact tracers.

Dean Shari Whicker, EdD, MEd, Dean and Professor, Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM), our students and faculty have started signing up for the Medical Reserve Corps and completing the contact tracing module. I encourage all who are able to do so to sign up.

In a recent conversation with Dr. Molly O’Dell, our region’s public health official, she noted how contact tracing is part of an effective community-based strategy for preventing further spread of COVID-19. Immediate action is needed to identify methods to ensure that public health initiatives and programs achieve their desired goals, and collaboration with local and state organizations, healthcare providers, universities, employers, and the public is critical to the success of these efforts.

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