Ad Hoc Group Weekly COVID-19 Follow Up
December 17, 2020

In this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we will be publishing an additional weekly update focused on COVID-19 to highlight related NIH actions and guidance as well as activities from the Ad Hoc Group community and general updates. As always, please forward any relevant items to Christa Wagner (chwagner@aamc.org) for inclusion in the publication!

Congressional and NIH News

Negotiations on COVID Relief Hold Up Year-End Package

The nearly $1.4 trillion FY 2021 omnibus is “largely finalized,” including funding for the NIH, but lawmakers continue negotiations on “sticking points” a year-end $900 billion COVID-19 relief package to accompany the yearly appropriations, as reported December 16 in Roll Call. With the December 18 deadline for the current CR fast approaching, Congress may need to pass an additional short-term extension to keep the government funded while negotiations and bill text are finalized. While leaders from both parties expressed interest in working towards the Friday deadline, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) told reporters, “If we need three or four more days we’re going to take such time as it’s necessary to fund the government. I’m not for shutting down the government and we’ll do what it takes to [avoid] that.”

HHS, NIH Launch Web Resource on COVID-19

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services partnered with the NIH and Operation Warp Speed to produce the website Combat COVID, an online resource to show the public how they can help fight COVID-19 based on an individual’s COVID-19 status. NIH Director Francis Collins, MD, PhD, described the new resource in a December 15 blog post as an “easy-to-navigate portal makes it even easier for you and your loved ones to reach informed decisions about your health and to find out how to help in the fight against COVID-19.”

NIH-Funded COVID-19 Home Test Is First to Receive Over-The-Counter Authorization From FDA

The first at-home coronavirus antigen test to receive emergency use authorization by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration was developed through NIH’s RADx Tech program, according to a December 15 NIH media advisory. The self-performed test uses a nasal swab for specimen collection, which is then inserted into a cartridge, analyzed, and delivers tests results to the user’s smartphone in 15 minutes. The test was designed by Ellume USA LLC, which plans to deliver millions of tests per month in 2021.

Baricitinib Plus Remdesivir Shows Promise for Treating COVID-19
Results from a National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)-funded clinical trial show reduced time to recovery for COVID-19 hospitalized patients given a combination anti-inflammatory and antiviral therapy, described in a December 11 NIH news release. Specifically, the trial investigated the combination of baricitinib and remdesivir, showing the best outcomes for patients who required oxygen or non-invasive ventilation during hospitalization. The study included more than 1,000 volunteers in eight countries.


NIH Director Francis Collins, MD, PhD, described the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the research enterprise as part of a December 15 report in The Guardian. The story described Collins’ work to join with other health agencies and industry in the ACTIV and RADx initiatives. Despite the rapid progress, Collins touched on the toll of the pace on researchers and agency leaders. “It has been utterly exhausting at times. I’ve been involved in plenty of intense scientific competitions but this is different. You have this sense that every day counts, that what you are working on may save some lives and that you cannot make mistakes, you cannot afford to give anything less than 100%,” he reflected. Collins also addressed a change in mentality to scientific progress. “A lot of what has happened this year are things that people would have said were not possible. We have now disproved that skepticism. It will be very hard for skepticism to carry the day in the future,” Collins concluded.

**BGOV: Fauci Seeks Scientific Sprint to Create Universal Virus Vaccine**

In a December 16 interview with Bloomberg Law, NIAID Director Anthony Fauci, MD, discussed the importance of investing in a universal coronavirus vaccine. With SARS-CoV-2 as the third coronavirus pandemic in the recent past, following SARS in 2003 and MERS in 2012, Fauci stated, “We have to get a universal coronavirus vaccine.” While it is not a guarantee that a universal coronavirus vaccine to combat all seven coronavirus strains would be a success, Fauci added that efforts towards this vaccine will be a high priority once the ongoing pandemic

**Upcoming Events**

**Apply for HIV Clinical Training Opportunities – January 19, 2021**

The HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA) and the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) Foundation are accepting applications for the 2021 HIV Clinical Fellowship Program. For the first time, the program is supporting one year of HIV clinical training for full or half-time effort awards to allow greater flexibility for physicians to train in community-based settings. The award supports a stipend of $33,000 for half-time training or $65,000 for full-time, plus funding to cover fringe benefits. Physicians whose communities are underrepresented in medicine or who interested in working in the Southeastern United States are strongly encouraged to apply. Program and application requirements are on the HIVMA website, including recommended competencies for HIVMA Clinical Fellows. The deadline to apply is Jan. 19, 2021. For more information, please email HIVMA.

**Apply for Medical Student HIV, Infectious Diseases Research Grants – February 5**
The Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) Foundation and HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA) seek applications for the **G.E.R.M (Grants for Emerging Researchers/Clinicians Mentorship) Program** for the 2021-2022 cycle. The program provides grants to medical students to support a mentored clinical learning and/or research project for up to a year, on infectious diseases and HIV related topics under the mentorship of an IDSA or HIVMA member. Applicants must be medical students (first, second or third year) from an accredited allopathic or osteopathic medical school in the U.S. Application information is available from the [IDSA Foundation website](https://www.idsociety.org/). Awardees receive a $4,000 stipend to complete their project. The deadline to apply is **February 5, 2021**. Please email HIVMA staff with questions.

**SOBC Capstone Conference – February 22-23**

This capstone research conference will celebrate ten years of the [NIH Science of Behavior Change (SOBC) Common Fund Program](https://www.nih.gov). The goal of the SOBC program is to advance behavior change research through a focus on mechanisms of change and the integration of basic research with applied/interventional research. The capstone conference will highlight innovative examples of behavior change research consistent with SOBC principles, from use-inspired basic research to mechanisms-focused intervention science. The capstone conference on February 22-23 will be virtual, open to the public, recorded, archived, and proceedings summarized in a publicly accessible report. The agenda, speaker information, and a link to registration will be available on this website in the coming months.

**NIH COVID-19 Resources**

- [NIH COVID-19 resource for applicants and grantees](https://sos.covid19.nih.gov/) including guidance for various aspects of research and grant application processes, as well as FAQs and COVID-19 funding opportunities.

- [COVID-19 “Updates History” webpage](https://sos.covid19.nih.gov/updates) that details relevant updates for applicants and grantees by date.

- [FAQ document on COVID-19 flexibilities](https://sos.covid19.nih.gov/faq) related to policies and programs affecting the grants process.

- [Funding opportunities specific to COVID-19](https://sos.covid19.nih.gov/opportunities) lists active and expired funding opportunities across NIH related to SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 research.

- [HHS COVID-19 awards tracking website](https://sos.covid19.nih.gov/awards) including data on awards made by all HHS awarding agencies with supplemental appropriations.

- **NEW** [Combat COVID website](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) including information for those who have never had COVID-19, have been infected, have recovered, and for health care providers.

**Job Postings**
AAMC Seeks Senior Science Policy Analyst
The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) seeks a Sr. Science Policy Specialist, to work closely with leadership in the Scientific Affairs team to provide up-to-date information on policy developments affecting biomedical research at member medical schools and teaching hospitals, prepare presentations and communications, and assist in the development of positions and responses to federal requests, especially on National Institutes of Health (NIH) matters. Key issue areas include medical/clinical research infrastructure, training and workforce development and on the issues promoting diversity and combatting sexual harassment in the STEMM workforce. Please visit the full job post for more information and to apply.

Please Note: If you have information of interest to the NIH advocacy community that you would like to share with the Ad Hoc Group, please forward it to Christa Wagner at chwagner@aamc.org or Tannaz Rasouli at trasouli@aamc.org.