Miami CTSI – Leading a Collaborative Effort to Facilitate Research and Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, while a significant disruptive event for research, resulted in a novel focus area for clinical and translational (C/T) researchers. Miami CTSI rapidly responded to this critical need by leading a collaborative effort to facilitate COVID-19 research and education initiatives for researchers and community stakeholders, while implementing innovative solutions to continue other research activities. Anticipating the influx of proposals and clinical studies related to coronavirus and COVID-19 research, Miami CTSI developed key infrastructure projects that enabled clinical research to be conducted remotely, ensured rapid feasibility assessment and activation of research studies, and leveraged the use of Electronic Health Records to facilitate real-time tracking, study feasibility assessment, and recruitment of patients into COVID-19 research studies. Early in the pandemic, three COVID-19 research proposals were funded through CTSI’s Emerging Diseases funding mechanism. CTSI also launched an online educational seminar series to disseminate scientific information on coronavirus and COVID-19 research being conducted by University of Miami (UM) researchers to the broader university community and created a dedicated page on its website showcasing a roundup of all COVID-19 related research at UM. Finally, supporting UM as the lead awardee institution in Florida for the NIH Community Engagement Alliance (CEAL) Against COVID-19 Disparities Program, CTSI is providing key expertise in educating minority communities across Florida working collaboratively to disseminate COVID-19 related research to the broader university community on a weekly basis. All of the above initiatives are aligned with the Miami CTSI’s strategic focus areas of C/T research infrastructure, education, and culturalized community engagement.

OUTCOMES AND COLLABORATIONS

- Creation of a COVID-19 Feasibility Committee enabled fast-tracking of studies that have the best chance of benefiting current and future patients and ensured that there are no duplicative studies recruiting the same participant population.
- Creation of a COVID-19 Dashboard using Electronic Health Record data ensured that real-time data points can be used to drive decisions which focus on optimizing clinical research and patient care.
- CTSI’s Emerging Diseases awards enabled early progress in point of care screening and diagnostics research, with the teams receiving subsequent external funding and a patent.
- Online education seminars allowed for dissemination of COVID-19 research to the broader university community on a weekly basis.
- Through rapid adoption and deployment of tools such as Zoom for Healthcare, Docusign, and REDCap e-consent, CTSI enabled researchers to continue critical research activities remotely.
- The Florida-CEAL brought together institutions and community partners across Florida working collaboratively to disseminate COVID-19 educational resources to minority communities and facilitate minority participation in clinical trials.

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED COLLABORATIONS

- University of Miami
- Florida International University
- Health Choice Network
- Moffitt Cancer Center
- University of Florida
- Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University