

May 29, 2020 | By Erika Johnson

## **\$1M Gift Speeds COVID-19 Testing and Tracking at UC San Diego**

**Funds from the John and Mary Tu Foundation support the work of translational research virologist Davey Smith, M.D.**

A \$1 million gift from the John and Mary Tu Foundation is helping to increase the number of people tested for COVID-19, as well as develop new ways to track and treat the virus. The award supports the clinical research activities of University of California San Diego translational research virologist Davey Smith, M.D., M.A.S., who is advancing new diagnostics, therapies and ways to monitor the spread of the virus.

“What we are trying to do is save lives,” said John Tu regarding the creation of the John and Mary Tu Foundation COVID-19 Response Fund. “It’s very simple: with this research, Dr. Smith is working on behalf of everybody, to save us, to save the world.”

“At this critical time during the COVID-19 pandemic, the generosity of the John and Mary Tu Foundation has an immediate positive impact on our efforts,” said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “Their support allows experts like Davey Smith to quickly mobilize to mitigate the spread of the virus and develop treatments for those affected.”

At the onset of the pandemic, Smith and his team immediately began to investigate methods that would increase the efficiency of testing as well as understand the disease process—how does the virus mutate and spread within a population? Through sequencing the virus, he is able to track the disease as it spreads into vulnerable populations, which informs the best means



*UC San Diego translational research virologist Davey Smith, M.D., M.A.S. Photo by Kyle Dykes/UC San Diego Health.*

for contact tracing (a process of supporting patients and warning contacts of exposure in order to stop chains of transmission). Smith is also leading clinical trials to test new drugs for treatment of COVID-19 for those who have moderately severe cases.

According to Smith, prior to this gift, he and his team had limited resources, which would have frozen their progress. “Without the support of the John and Mary Tu Foundation, we would not have been able to continue in our CoV-2 lab-based and clinical research,” he explained. “The foundation saw that time was of the essence in this pandemic and that science was going to get us out of it. Now we are conducting a number of clinical trials, including those for vaccines, and have found new drugs that will likely move to treatments soon.”

As chief of UC San Diego’s Division of Infectious Diseases and Global Public Health and co-director of the San Diego Center for AIDS Research, Smith and his team are uniquely positioned to rapidly respond to the spread of COVID-19, as well as forecast the pandemic. “It’s not a matter of if a pandemic can happen, but when,” said Smith. “We need to bolster science, technology and capabilities to prepare for pandemics.”

Smith has been on the front lines as the virus evolves. He has leveraged core technologies and partnered with top clinical infectious disease specialists at UC San Diego to conduct diagnostic tests, identify and test new antiviral drugs, develop antibody therapies, and launch vaccine trials. Now, thanks to the new gift, he has the resources needed to speed COVID-19 discoveries, minimize exposure and save lives.

The gift from the John and Mary Tu Foundation strengthens UC San Diego’s efforts to respond to the pandemic. The university launched a COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund to address the greatest needs in this evolving situation, and move forward with research and health care efforts to better understand and respond to COVID-19. [Learn more about the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund](#) and how your philanthropy – as part of the Campaign for UC San Diego – can help develop new treatments for those affected by the disease.

Together, we are continuing our nontraditional path toward revolutionary ideas, unexpected answers, lifesaving discoveries and planet-changing impact. To learn more about the Campaign for UC San Diego, a university-wide comprehensive fundraising effort concluding in 2022, visit [campaign.ucsd.edu](https://campaign.ucsd.edu).

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