May 15, 2020

To All Patients of Our Columbia Community:

I hope this finds you, your family, and friends all safe and healthy.

As Chief of the Division of Hematology and Oncology at Columbia University/NYP, I would like to take this moment to tell you how much we have been thinking of each of you during this unprecedented time. I realize that many of you have been under self-quarantine for quite some time now, and some of you may even have lost loved ones. For this, I extend my heartfelt condolences.

Over the past several weeks we have made every effort to keep our cancer program safe for all. To achieve this goal, we have reduced patient volumes in our infusion units and our waiting rooms, used telehealth for video visits, initiated a COVID-19 screening program in our HIP lobby, and deferred chemotherapy and radiology imaging tests when possible. With the introduction of these initiatives, we have been able to keep our HIP building and the infusion unit a “COVID-free” environment.

Our goal now is to maintain this high level of safety to ensure that you are protected in every way possible. Toward that end, we have undertaken the following new initiatives:

1. Revised schedules to reduce crowding in our waiting areas and lobby
2. A COVID screening program with fever and symptom checks in our HIP lobby
3. COVID nasal swab testing of all cancer patients with each cancer treatment.
4. Rapid day of treatment blood tests before chemotherapy in a new “FAST TRACK” center localized in a new area off the Milstein lobby
5. A patient waiting area off the “FAST TRACK” to maintain safe social distancing before treatment
6. Concierges to guide patients to these new points of contact
7. Navigators to regulate flow of patients into the elevators
8. An elevator specific for cancer patients to bring them to the cancer center floors

Our schedulers will be reaching out to you for appointment times. Additional plans are also underway to extend our office hours to accommodate your work schedule, as well as including office hours with infusion visits on Saturdays.

Our goal is to create an environment in a “new” Columbia that continues to offer the very best in cancer care where the safety of our patients come first.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Gary K. Schwartz, MD