UHealth Signs Collaborative Memorandum of Understanding with Jamaica’s Minister of Health

The University of Miami Miller School of Medicine and UHealth – University of Miami Health System have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Jamaica’s minister of health to improve the health infrastructure in Jamaica and the Caribbean through education and collaboration.

From left: Dr. Dipen J. Parekh; Dr. Chad R. Ritch; Dean Henri R. Ford; the Honorable Christopher Tufton, D.B.A.; Dr. Tanya Clarke, president of the University of the West Indies Medical Alumni Association; and the Honorable Oliver Mair, consul general of Jamaica.

The Miller School is the first and, to date, the only U.S. academic health care institution to sign an MOU with Jamaica’s
Ministry of Health and Wellness.

“The signing of the MOU advances and formalizes the relationship which we have been building throughout the years with Jamaica and the Caribbean to provide education and health care services,” said Chad R. Ritch, M.D., M.B.A., associate director, UHealth International and associate professor of urology within the Desai Sethi Urology Institute.

Dr. Ritch, who is originally from Jamaica, worked directly with Jamaica’s Minister of Health and Wellness, The Honorable Christopher Tufton, D.B.A., to orchestrate the MOU.

Opening Lines of Communication

While the one-year MOU is aimed at opening direct lines of communication between the countries and determining how best to share knowledge and resources, there are many ways in which the collaboration might benefit Jamaica, UHealth, and the Miller School, according to Dr. Ritch.

“Dr. Tufton has mentioned the need for a U.S. academic health system with the strategic know-how that could provide input as they are rebuilding their health care infrastructure, while also enhancing the quality and capacity of health care in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean,” said Dr. Ritch. “That’s one way in which UHealth and the Miller School could help, because we have a long history of building successful hospitals, specialty clinics, and educating medical professionals.”

Another way the Miller School would help is through education, including providing training for Jamaican and Caribbean health care staff at the Miller School, and orchestrating opportunities for volunteer health care staff from the U.S. to
provide as-needed, on-site, short-term care for the Jamaican Ministry of Health.

“The first trip we made, we had initial discussions with our Jamaican colleagues here around the need for collaboration. The Miller School is a very prestigious academic institution, with the capacity to help us build our health care infrastructure,” Dr. Tufton said. “There are many reasons we are a good fit. There is a large population of Jamaicans in South Florida. And the Miller School is ideal logistically, only one plane ride away.

“It was only right that we found a collaboration with the island that will allow with the technology or easy access to medical models, whether in training or in technical exchanges of one form or another,” Dr. Tufton said. “What we are hoping to achieve here with this agreement is the basis for a conversation that can be more specific.”

**Mutual Benefit**

The health system also stands to benefit from the collaboration, said Dipen J. Parekh, M.D., chief operating officer for UHealth, founding director of Desai Sethi Urology Institute, and executive dean for clinical affairs at the Miller School.

“The partnership will help streamline our ability to care for international patients from Jamaica and the Caribbean when needed, and it will pave the way for our faculty and researchers to conduct research on diverse populations from those areas,” Dr. Parekh said. “In essence, it eliminates many of the administrative hurdles that the Miller School and other researchers face when they attempt to conduct studies in a
foreign country. This will allow us to concentrate less on red tape and more on clinical research that includes patients who are traditionally underrepresented in medical studies.

“Since South Florida mirrors Jamaican and Caribbean populations, the work we do there will likely translate into the care we provide here to our local Caribbean community,” he said.

The MOU is a pioneering agreement which Dr. Tufton said he hopes will lead to a tangible work program.

**Forward-Looking Agreement**

Dr. Tufton has held positions in Jamaica as minister of industry, investment, and commerce, and as minister of agriculture and fisheries. He is known for launching forward-thinking initiatives. As minister of agriculture, for example, he spearheaded expansion of greenhouse farming technology and the creation of agro-processing facilities.

“We’re looking at the future of health care, at a new model that would allow collaboration to enhance training and even to allow flexible contracts between the Caribbean and U.S., in order to create environments where health care professionals can thrive and provide quality care wherever they live and practice. Ours is an attempt to adjust to the new health care dynamic, as opposed to trying to fight it,” Dr. Tufton said.

“From the perspective of the University, President Frenk’s vision is for us to be the hemispheric, the excellent, the relevant University. And that only happens by extending the excellence that exists at University of Miami into all our sister nations in the Caribbean and Latin America,” said Henri Ford, M.D., Dean of the Miller School. “So, this is, to me,
just an extension of that commitment and of who we are. It's a pleasure to be able to formalize this understanding.”

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