

HEADLINE: In these times, courage and compassion necessary traits

Governor Whitmer's prudent decision on Monday for Michigan residents to "suspend activities not necessary to sustain or protect life" reflects the type of courageous and compassionate leadership that places the health of our citizens above all other considerations.

The governor's executive order is not a trade-off between the health of our citizens and the health of our economy. A healthy public enables a healthy workforce, healthy health systems, healthy small and large businesses and a healthy economy. It also requires a responsible and strong response from each of us as Michigan residents.

Perhaps you have already seen first-hand the ravaging impact of COVID-19. Or, like most of us, you're feeling tremendous anxiety of not knowing what will be the effect on the health of your loved ones.

Many are worried about how this situation will affect their own livelihoods. And there's widespread concern over the state of our economy with failing global markets and the impact on retirement savings and long-term employment.

You're not alone.

Making sure we win this battle against COVID-19 requires traits that are always needed in difficult times, traits that Governor Whitmer exhibits – courage and compassion.

Over my career as a physician, health system administrator and university president, I've seen up close how courage and compassion provide the strength and common purpose that are vital in persevering.

In these challenging times, a simple three-fold prescription can be very effective in relieving stress and anxiety and increase strength and productivity. We must take care of ourselves; we must take care of our loved ones; and, we must reach out to help our broader community.

First, take care of yourself by eating healthy foods, get enough sleep and get lots of exercise. Even with the current restriction to stay home, you are encouraged to get outside to exercise as long as you maintain a distance of six feet from other people. Start reading a new book or learn a new language on-line or try to gain a new skill. Download a meditation app or start keeping a daily gratitude journal, in which you track things for which you are grateful.

Second, keeping social distance does not mean that you must be distant socially. Stay in touch with friends and loved ones. Call, text, write, face-time, Zoom—now is a great time to reconnect with your grandmother or your college roommate!

And finally, what can you do to support our communities? There are few times in our recent history when others have needed you more. People are isolated in their homes, unable to get food, medications, comfort, socialization, financial support, and love.

Parents must work from home with no child care and no relief; children have no one to tutor them or with whom to play; hospitals are beyond capacity and health care providers are working in dangerous circumstances, selflessly exposing themselves to COVID-19, while working to save lives.

At Oakland University, we initiated The Engagement and Mobilization team (TEAM), which coordinates relief efforts among OU volunteers, county agencies and nonprofits. Our volunteers provide crisis-line assistance, tutoring, babysitting and food to those in need. Volunteering is done only under strict supervision where the health and safety of volunteers can be maintained.

Furthermore, we have offered the Oakland University campus as a potential site for COVID-19 testing and our residence halls, should there be a need to quarantine COVID-19 positive individuals.

As all of us face the unprecedented personal, institutional, societal and global challenges from the spread of COVID-19, there's a pressing need for perspective, patience and persistence, especially with the frenzied 24/7 media coverage and increasingly doomsday predictions.

During these past weeks, the way we work and live has changed dramatically. At a time when people around the world are isolated in their homes, remember that your acts of courage and compassion will help you through these challenging days and will ensure that our collective future will be secure.

Ora Hirsch Pescovitz is president of Oakland University. She served as Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs and Health System CEO at the University of Michigan Health System; President/CEO, Riley Hospital for Children (Indiana); and, Senior Vice President and U.S. Medical Leader for Lilly Biomedicines, Eli Lilly.