

Science and Data

An Interview with Kenneth L. Davis, MD, President and Chief Executive Officer, Mount Sinai Health System

EDITORS' NOTE Dr. Kenneth Davis attended the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and completed a residency and fellowship in psychiatry and pharmacology, respectively, at Stanford University Medical Center. Upon returning to Mount Sinai, he became Chief of Psychiatry at the Mount Sinai-affiliated Bronx Veterans Administration Medical Center and launched Mount Sinai's research program in the biology of schizophrenia and Alzheimer's disease therapeutics. Davis was appointed CEO of Mount Sinai Medical Center in 2003



Kenneth L. Davis

after spending 15 years as Chair of Mount Sinai's Department of Psychiatry. He was the first director for many of the institution's research entities and received one of the first and largest program project grants for Alzheimer's disease research from the National Institutes of Health. Davis also served as Dean of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai from 2003 to 2007 and as President of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology in 2006. In 2002, he was elected to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, and in 2009 his undergraduate alma mater, Yale University, presented him with the George H. W. Bush '48 Lifetime of Leadership Award.

INSTITUTION BRIEF Mount Sinai Health System (mountsinai.org) encompasses the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and eight hospitals, as well as a large and expanding ambulatory care network. The eight hospitals – Mount Sinai Beth Israel, Mount Sinai Brooklyn, The Mount Sinai Hospital, Mount Sinai Queens, Mount Sinai St. Luke's, Mount Sinai South Nassau, Mount Sinai West, and New York Eye and Ear Infirmary of Mount Sinai – have a vast geographic footprint throughout the New York metropolitan region. In 2018, Mount Sinai Health System hospitals received roughly 4 million patient visits, including inpatients, outpatients and the emergency department.

The Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai opened in 1968 and has more than 6,500 faculty members in 34 academic departments and 39 clinical and research institutes. A renowned medical school, it is ranked number four in the nation among medical schools for overall research funding per principal investigator. The Mount Sinai Hospital is ranked number 14 in the nation by U.S. News & World Report and ranked in the top 20 nationally in eight medical specialties in the 2019-20 "Best Hospitals" guidebook. The New York Eye and Ear Infirmary of Mount Sinai is also ranked nationally in ophthalmology.

The world is fighting a public health crisis that is impacting all countries and their citizens. Mount Sinai Health System has been on the front lines in this battle. What do you say to your team who are the true leaders and heroes risking their lives to protect others?

I couldn't be prouder of their efforts, their heroism and that they put their lives on the line. We must keep in mind that no one entered medicine nor it's allied professions with the thought that some-

day they would be risking their lives. They knew that they would be hopefully helping others, relieving suffering, diminishing pain, prolonging life and fighting against disease, but they didn't think that in doing that, they'd be putting their own lives on the line, but that's what we asked them to do and they are doing it. We are forever grateful.

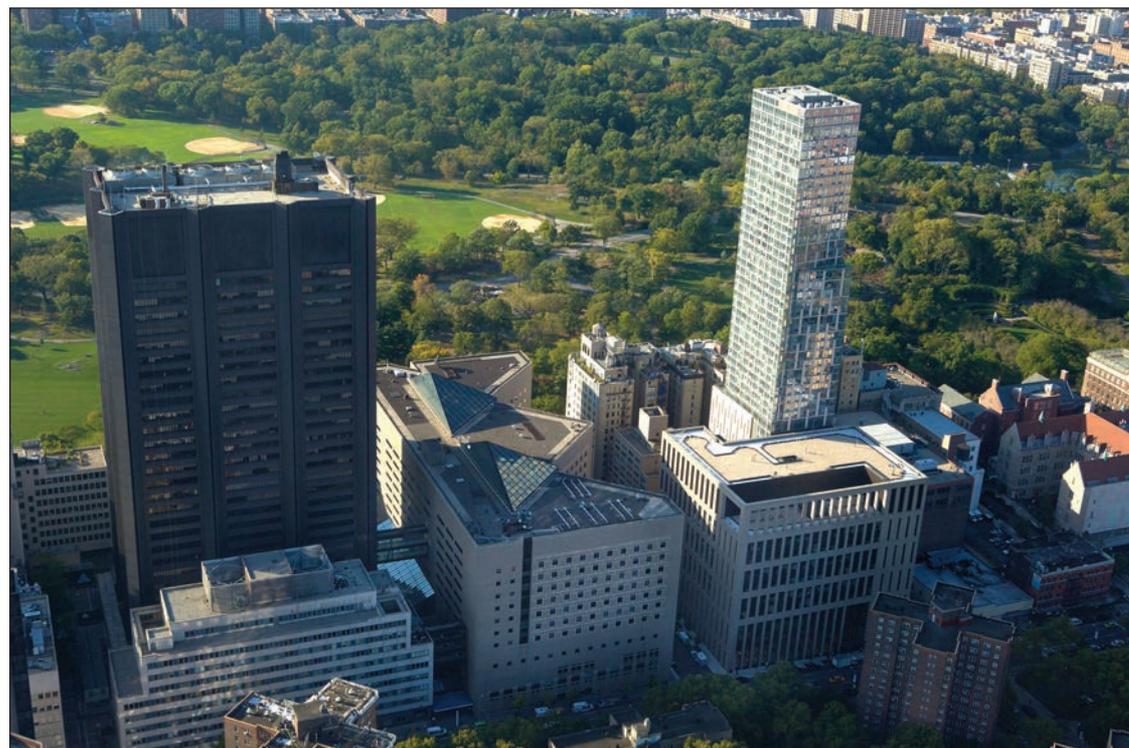
How critical is it follow data and science when addressing a public health crisis, especially during a time of partisanship and political divide in the country?

It's all about science and data. We need the best and most rigorous science possible and extensive data in order to make decisions about effective therapeutics. What are the effective approaches to care? When do you give a steroid? When do you use a ventilator? There are a number of interventions that are possible, and we have to have their use be driven by science that creates data which directs what we do. That ensures that we are always providing the best medicine.

Where do you feel New York City stands in its fight against the virus and what are the keys to winning this war?

We've come from an unthinkable position to an incredible place where we are hardly seeing new patients now. That's an 180 degree switch from where we were. We have to be extremely pleased with how we responded and where we came from and where we are now. It wouldn't have happened without some of the great political leadership that we have had and the support that we have received from so many places.

Mount Sinai Health System is a purpose-driven organization with a long history of supporting its employees, patients and communities. How has Mount Sinai



The campus of Mount Sinai Health System on Manhattan's Upper West Side

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Health System adapted the way it works during this unprecedented time in order to continue to effectively support its employees, patients and communities?

During this period in which we have a hiatus, we are hoping we don’t have a second wave, but recognize that we might have one, we need to take this time to really support those workers who put their lives on the line. They have a lot of stress. It would be wrong for us to think that there won’t be a substantial number of our people with post-traumatic stress disorders. We are seeing those now who are having problems sleeping or having problems with anxiety or who are somewhat dysphoric because of all the stress that they went through and the memories that they have. I can recall numerous e-mails that I received that have told of previous assignments before COVID where there might have been one death a month in a unit. Today, there might have been three deaths in a single shift. Those same front line workers may then go home to a husband or wife who is quarantined, and children who are away from school. They may have to share dinner with their spouse under the door while being petrified that they are going to make their family sick. They never dreamed that they would have to face this. It’s critical that we support those people.

We put together a whole center around post-traumatic care for our workers. We also have to remember that for many survivors, there is still organ damage that will compromise their lives going forward and they need post-COVID care too. They might have a heart or kidneys or lungs that were damaged or have suffered small strokes. They’re going to need a lot of rehab and have a long recovery. We have to work to help them too.

Mount Sinai Health System was built with an entrepreneurial spirit and an ability to be nimble and adapt. How critical has it been to be able to adapt and change course quickly in order to meet the challenges of the pandemic?

We were changing at the beginning with some incredible frequency. We have eight hospitals and 400 ambulatory sites. We would get input from any number of places that would require us to move within minutes and make decisions. Mount Sinai Brooklyn might have been overwhelmed with patients in their emergency room and needed a place to send patients. We were also dealing with issues like

PPE sitting on the runway at Nanjing Airport in China and how we were going to get it out. We had to make decisions at the moment and be nimble and we did so with good results.

There is a great deal of discussion about businesses reopening in a “new normal.” What is your outlook for what this new normal may look like and how is Mount Sinai Health System preparing for the next stage in this crisis?

We have to be very careful. We can’t think that just because we’re doing well now that when people move indoors and schools begin to congregate students that the good news that we have now is going to continue. I would say the wisest thing to do is to be as conservative as we can be. We need to continue our social distancing, our masking, not congregating in large groups until such time that there’s an effective vaccine or vaccines. Only then will we be able to really revert to what was once our normal activities.

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Mount Sinai Health System is a leader in New York City. What are the keys to New York City’s recovery and what needs to be done to ensure a safe and effective reopening of the city?

We’ve already been approached by a number of large employer groups who are asking us to guide them on what life should be like when we return over the next few months to

more normal activity. What should we do? How should we screen? Can you help us with testing? We’re partnering with a number of large employee groups to provide testing with rapid results and to provide advice on guidelines on how they can return to work. We’ll encourage them to accept people who are working virtually until such time as there is an effective vaccine.

What do you see as the role that business and the private sector can play as a force for good in society by bringing its talent, expertise and resources to help address global crises?

We can provide science-based guidelines on how to return to a more normal state until we have a vaccine. We’ve lived it, we’ve seen it and we’ve been on the front lines of the generation of antibody tests, of convalescent plasma, and of streamlining some of the tests for COVID itself. We can be there to provide the critical information that people are going to need as life starts to return to a more “normal” state before we have a vaccine.

During this difficult and uncertain time, what are you telling your people and what would you say to young people across the country who are deeply concerned and uncertain about the future?

When I was a very, very young child, maybe six or seven years old, my parents were petrified that I might get polio. Kids who were paralyzed by polio had their lives completely changed by polio and the work on a vaccine had been ongoing for decades. There was no treatment so my parents had lived through that for decades and were petrified. But look how different it is today. By the time we have a vaccine for COVID-19, we will have lived through this epidemic for less than a year, not for decades like my parents did with polio. This is a symbol of my progress and a reason for remaining positive about the future.

Science has moved so quickly that as soon as the world needed a vaccine, there were over a hundred institutions attempting to develop it. There are now close to 25 that are in trials and there are three or four that are cutting toward the end stage. What a statement that makes about how fast science moves, how far we have come, that we can be so optimistic about curing a disease that is so threatening.

We will win and that’s a great statement about where science has taken humanity. ●