Hi Team –

Happy New Year to each and every team member, physician and volunteer! I hope you were able to spend time with family and loved ones over the holidays to rest and recharge so that together we are ready to take on the challenges of calendar year 2022 and beyond, including ending this pandemic once and for all! I want to give a special shout-out and express my heartfelt thanks to the thousands of frontline team members, physicians, nurses, caregivers and support teams who sacrificed some or all of their holidays to continue caring for our patients. And let's also give a shout-out to our very own Bengals for providing us something to cheer about by winning the AFC North division and making the playoffs for the first time since 2015!

**COVID Update**

Unfortunately, we begin the new year with sobering news and yet another reminder of the unpredictable nature of COVID-19. The far more transmissible Omicron variant, first detected in the fall, is accelerating quickly across the country and now accounts for more than two-thirds of all cases in our region. And as a result, hospitals and ICUs are at or nearing capacity throughout our region, including our own TriHealth hospitals, and Cleveland hospitals are approaching a state of emergency due to an overwhelming demand for hospital beds. As indicated in the sidebar to the right, we currently have over 180 COVID inpatients at TriHealth with 20 COVID patients on ventilators. Equally concerning, one in every three symptomatic patients tested over the past two weeks at TriHealth has been positive for COVID.

**COVID-19 Weekly Update**

- **182** COVID-positive patients in TriHealth hospitals with **20** on ventilators in the ICU.

- **18.2%** COVID positivity rate in the region, with a **36.1%** positivity rate for symptomatic patients tested at TriHealth over past two weeks. **Target positivity rate is under 5%!**

- R-factor for 14-county region now at **1.27**. Hamilton County R-factor now at **1.40**. **Target R-factor is below 1.0.**

Regionally, the overall positivity rate continues to climb, now approaching 20% – the highest rate since early September and an indication of the rapid and continued spread of this variant. We are keeping a close eye on – and readying our system for – a potential spike in new cases over the upcoming 7 to 10 days following travel and family gatherings over the holidays.

**Updating Our COVID Return to Work Policy**

As has been the case throughout this Delta and now also Omicron-fueled fourth wave, our biggest challenge has been and remains ensuring we can safely care for all of our patients in need with appropriate bedside and support staffing. And these industry-wide staffing challenges have been complicated by the recent increase in healthcare workers contracting the more transmissible Omicron variant. At TriHealth, we have seen more than a 250% increase in team members quarantined due to COVID in recent weeks, nearly all with mild cases. Recognizing these healthcare industry staffing challenges, last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its guidance on return to work for healthcare providers following an active COVID infection or exposure. As has been the case throughout this ongoing pandemic, TriHealth's infectious disease experts evaluated this "science-based" guidance, and as a result, took steps last week to begin to implement these recommendations throughout TriHealth. Based on CDC recommendations, those who have received booster shots will not have to undergo quarantine after high-risk exposure as long as they remain asymptomatic. Those who are vaccinated but have not received the booster and those who have exemptions will similarly not have to be quarantined after an exposure, but they must have a negative test before returning to work. Most significantly, the CDC is now allowing team members who have tested positive for COVID but with no or mild symptoms to return to work in five days, with or without a negative test, provided there has been no fever within

24 hours (without fever-reducing medication) and the team member is feeling better. These recommendations are based on what the CDC and other scientists have learned about this new variant and how and when the virus is shed. As a result, these recommendations should help ease some of the staffing pressures caused by excessive quarantining.

**TriHealth's COVID "Playbook": Our Surge and Capacity Management Plans**
Forecasting models project this wave to peak in late January or early February. So, to help us manage through the anticipated increase in demand for our services over the next several weeks, we are relying on our proven and battle-tested "playbook" of COVID surge and capacity management practices and staffing strategies. These include ramping up our Helping Hands program and offering meaningful incentives to eligible team members who are taking on extra shifts. Operationally, we are now collaborating with our physician and clinical leaders to limit elective surgeries and procedures that require hospital admissions whenever possible in order to keep beds available for COVID and other critical patients. And, we are shifting experienced caregivers from less-busy procedural areas like ambulatory surgery and GI to support our care teams on our hospital floors. In addition, we are continuing to actively manage our patient throughput, through initiatives such as fully recovering patients in the post anesthesia care units (PACUs) to avoid taking up inpatient beds as well as use of discharge holding areas to allow patients to leave their rooms sooner while awaiting post-discharge placement or rides. And, as evidence of our effectiveness in operating as one highly integrated health system, we are regularly "load balancing" by moving patients between hospitals within our system where there are available beds to ensure that our flagship tertiary hospitals have bed capacity to care for the most critically ill patients. That is exactly the kind of "One Team" behavior, rooted in our TriHealth Way culture, that sets us apart as a model for other health systems regionally and nationally, and which is helping in so many ways to get us through this current crisis.

**Do Your Part by Getting "Boosted"**
On top of our "battle-tested" surge and capacity management practices, there is one thing all of us can do to help protect our patients and caregivers and eventually ease the capacity strain we're experiencing in our hospitals – and that is, **get your booster shot!!** Emerging clinical studies and real-world data indicate that getting a COVID booster is one of the safest and best ways to protect ourselves, our loved ones, and our patients from severe COVID infection. And early evidence indicates getting "boosted" is the best protection against the highly transmissible Omicron variant. And reinforcing that point, at TriHealth, more than 80% of current COVID patients in our hospitals with serious illness are unvaccinated. To help make getting boosted as easy and convenient as possible for our team members and physicians, TriHealth Employee Health has set up team member-only COVID booster vaccine clinics starting this week at Bethesda North Outpatient Imaging (BNOI) and Good Samaritan Hospital. Simply click this link to schedule your appointment or visit Bridge for more options on booster vaccine appointments.

**Incident Command Center Actively Managing Through this Fourth Wave**
Our Incident Command Center and Operations Team have been meeting daily – often multiple times – to address the rapidly shifting COVID landscape and challenges we are experiencing from this latest surge. The team has done a remarkable job of planning for and responding to all possible scenarios – including the one we are in right now – ensuring that we are there for our patients and community at their time of greatest need. For example, last week the Command Center sent this important update to TriHealth's 800+ leaders to prepare them for the post-holiday spike in cases and to ensure that we are operating as one unified team. (Click here to download).

Over the past few weeks, I have rounded on hundreds of team members, physicians, volunteers and patients in our hospitals, Emergency Departments, COVID units, ambulatory campuses and physician practices. I came away

from every single interaction humbled and proud, and privileged to be part of this amazing team…  a team that has always put our patients first, even in the face of the seemingly unending challenges and many sacrifices brought on by COVID. I cannot find the words to thank you enough for your commitment and dedication to serve our patients, our community and each other throughout this now two-year pandemic. And, with the best team anywhere within the healthcare industry, we are succeeding and will overcome what are hopefully the final challenges of this pandemic, while we continue to advance our vision in Getting Healthcare Right for the community we serve – TOGETHER as One Team, TriHealth Strong.