The Research Agenda

This issue is dedicated to our Department’s response to the novel coronavirus. One of many positives to arise out of this pandemic was the focus of our faculty on their research projects. This Spring, we were able to fund the highest number of Saligman Pilot Grants – six (6), the most ever!

I just read the 2008 Nobel Laureate (in Economics), Paul Krugman’s latest book – Arguing with Zombies. I recommend it to those with an interest in basic (Keynesian) economics, public policy, and two decades of discourse regarding the U.S., Social Security, Obamacare, the Euro, the housing bubble of 2008, etc. He also discusses his perspective on research.

Krugman offers his four basic rules for research:

1) Listen to the Gentiles – “pay attention to what intelligent people are saying, even if they do not have your customs or speak your analytical language.”

2) Question the question – ask if people are working on the proper questions, and be prepared for pushback from the establishment!

3) Dare to be silly – embrace new assumptions, anticipate ridicule from critics, but have the courage to promote innovative and unique theses.

4) Simplify, simplify – strip down the concepts to a minimalist analytical language.

Krugman’s four rules, though designed for economic theory, are very relevant to both clinical and bench science. Not all solutions need to be complicated, sophisticated and obtuse. Perhaps one of our six Saligman Pilot Grant Recipients will make a novel and innovative discovery taking these four rules to heart. It was very gratifying to read these six creative Saligman Pilot Grants submitted by our faculty.

The Doctor Is ‘On’: Telemedicine Takes Off During COVID-19

Thomas Jefferson University Hospital has offered telemedicine through the JeffConnect® service since 2015. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, the service averaged 40 to 60 scheduled daily visits. During the pandemic, it reached more than 3,000 per day system wide – giving patients and providers firsthand experience with this method of care delivery.

“Jefferson Health prepared for a worst-case scenario of a local pandemic that could leave our healthcare workers quarantined, sick or absent,” says Judd Hollandier, MD, Professor of Emergency Medicine and Associate Dean for Strategic Health Initiatives, Sidney Kimmel Medical College. “By converting scheduled office visits to telemedicine visits, we enabled our clinicians to continue caring for established, nonexposed patients. We also used our telemedical services to triage patients exhibiting potential COVID-19 symptoms.”

Even before the pandemic, the Department of Surgery’s use of telemedicine was already on the rise, according to Director of Clinical Operations, Andrea DeLamasto. She notes that providers were easily attaining the Departmental goal of 700 visits per year. As of May 27, 2020, the year-to-date number already exceeds 2,900.

DeLamasto notes that in the past, surgeons sometimes remarked that the technology was difficult to use, and making a phone call was the easier choice. “Now the technology has improved and made it much easier and more convenient for both patients and providers.”

“We have found it takes 12 to 15 visits for a provider to feel comfortable. Once they do 20 to 30, they will join the group of the comfortable.”

Will this surge in adoption lead to enduring change? Dr. Hollandier thinks it could. “Like every other enduring change? Dr. Hollander thinks it could. “Like every other new challenge, you have to try telemedicine to get comfortable with it.”

“Now I am seeing about half of patients as telehealth visits. In fact, I have scheduled several patients for surgery having only met them virtually,” she says. “I meet them for the first time in person right before surgery. I find that very unusual, but patients seem very comfortable with it.”

For more information about using JeffConnect for on-demand or scheduled patient visits as well as remote consults and virtual rounds with family members, visit: Jefferson.edu/JeffConnect