



Extreme Innovation in the Face of Extreme Disruption
Welcoming Remarks
Connected Health and COVID-19 Conference
June 12, 2020

Distinguished speakers, honored guests, and especially the organizers of this event, and my colleague Professor Daneshmand, I extend a sincere and enthusiastic welcome to the *Connected Health and COVID-19* virtual conference. I am delighted to offer a brief welcome to all of you—you are pioneers who represent some of the most prestigious academic and research organizations in the world—and I commend you for your proactive efforts to utilize your talents, your expertise, your creativity, and your networks to bring to bear advancements and innovations in science and technology to ameliorate what is one of the most complex and complicated problems of our lifetime.

In the last three months, individuals and institutions that form the foundations of our society have witnessed extreme disruption at a scale most of us could not have anticipated. The public health crisis that became the global coronavirus pandemic has wrought havoc on families, on finances, on food supply, and on so many things we previously took for granted. So far, more than seven million people have tested positive in the world, and more than 400,000 people have died from this disease. The pandemic has illuminated the vulnerabilities in our health care system and the disfunction in our political systems. It has viciously attacked the most vulnerable among us, while indiscriminately affecting the lives and livelihoods of a broad swath of the world's population. The pandemic has also accentuated some of the embedded inequities in our societies.

As the president of a university, I know first-hand the extreme disruption the coronavirus has caused to our students, our faculty, our researchers, and to my colleagues who provide support to all these stakeholders. This has been the most intense and turbulent time in my 36 year in academia and 26 years as a university administrator. The stakes have never been higher for decisions we have had to make with incomplete information. Our decisions have had serious consequences for the health and safety of our community and for the academic progress of our students—and therefore, their dreams of a college degree and future success.

Yet, in the face of extreme disruption—a nearly overnight transition to online learning and remote business operations; providing technology resources for students in need; turning a residence hall into housing for first responders and hospital workers; converting all admissions events, conferences, and meetings into virtual formats, and a relentless series of decisions and adaptations that needed to be made—I have witnessed ingenuity, selflessness, determination, and innovation.

Like many of the institutions you represent, our students got to work on using 3D printers to produce PPE. Our School of Business faculty developed a virtual seminar series on leadership in times of crisis. Our researchers across a variety of academic disciplines developed innovations

to overcome the coronavirus: low-cost ventilators that can be shared by multiple patients; solutions that reduce ventilator injuries in patients' lungs; and next-gen membranes for surgical masks, among many others.

The scholars and researchers who are participating in today's conference will, I am certain, generate far grander innovations that will pave the way for solving some of the problems that the coronavirus pandemic has uncovered. You will harness the power of artificial intelligence to enhance diagnosis, prevention, and drug discovery; you will improve virtual healthcare for vulnerable patients; you will find new ways of sampling, monitoring, and tracing patients affected by this and future pandemics. You will generate extreme innovation in the face of extreme disruption. And, importantly, you will positively impact the lives of others through your pioneering research and collaborative efforts.

I thank you for allowing me to be with you at the start of what I know will be a very successful day and the beginning of an era of cooperation to overcome a life-altering challenge.

I wish you much success today and in the future.

Thank you.



Nariman Farvardin
President



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