



Improving COVID-19 treatment through research

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Having biked 2,500 miles last year, Mark Revord is proud of his health. The 59-year-old credits his strong physical fitness to a social life that revolves around cycling. He's the kind of guy who's only taken a few sick days away from work in past ten years

So when Mark started showing the hallmark symptoms of COVID-19 in late March, he was confident that he'd overcome the virus on his own.

He self-isolated in his basement, rested and drank plenty of fluids. But, his symptoms worsened.

By the ninth day, he had a 102 degree fever with uncontrollable body shakes. His wife's friend, who's a nurse, suggested he visit his clinic.

At HealthPartners St. Paul Clinic, a patchy, clouded lung x-ray revealed he had pneumonia, a severe complication that's associated with COVID-19. His resting blood-oxygen levels – which should be at or very near 100 – were in the low 90s and dropped with every step he took.

Mark then went to Regions Hospital where he was admitted and given supplemental oxygen. "When I first got symptoms, I was sure my immune system could handle it," Mark said. "When I had to go to the hospital, I still wasn't scared but I was more surprised at how hard it hit me."

Service through science

On Mark's second day in the hospital, critical care physician Charles Bruen, MD, and HealthPartners Institute's critical care research director Sandi Wewerka visited his room. They asked if he'd like to join a clinical trial for a drug called Auxora. It's one of several COVID-19 studies that HealthPartners Institute is supporting.

The drug has long been used to treat lung inflammation in patients with severe pancreatitis. But they and others are now exploring whether it could also provide benefit to COVID-19 patients with poorly functioning lungs. Regions and Methodist are two of the three trial sites nationwide. "I rarely go to the doctor, let alone the hospital, so I had never been in a clinical trial," Mark said. "But I had very little hesitation when they came in and explained the science, risks and how this research will hopefully help more people overcome COVID-19 down the road. If it leads to better treatment for others, I'm in."

A promising recovery

Mark joined the trial and received multiple rounds of the drug via IV drip. After four days, he was well enough to go home.

While it's still unclear if the drug is what helped him recover, preliminary data from the clinical trial is promising. Patients who were on the drug had a 50 percent shorter hospital stay, compared to patients on standard of care. And, the drug was associated with a 50 percent reduction in the proportion of patients who were put on ventilators compared to patients on standard of care.

Now the Food and Drug Administration is recommending the trial proceed to the next phase of testing.

Mark is still working up to his pre-COVID fitness levels. He often reminds people that this is more serious than the flu.

When asked why he thinks his body's response to the virus was worse than so many other people's responses?

"I don't know, but the only way we will figure anything out is through research."

Pictured above, Mark Revord (right) and his wife Kathy.



Mark Revord