

An AIDS Foundation Weathers COVID



CAMPBELL FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR KEN RAPKIN

By Susan R. Miller

In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic has mirrored the early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In both cases people were, and still are, dying of a disease that seemingly came out of nowhere.

For COVID-19 researchers, as it was for HIV/AIDS researchers, it has been an all-hands-on-deck scenario to treat and cure the disease.

With so much attention now on COVID-19, many long-standing HIV/AIDS funders and researchers have shifted their focus, leaving some to question when, or if, there will be a return to the pre-COVID funding days.

One organization that has stayed the course over the last year has been The Campbell Foundation, a private, independent foundation based in Fort Lauderdale, whose main mission has been funding laboratory-based HIV/AIDS research projects since 1995. In the last 26 years, the foundation has funded more than 165 clinical research studies. In addition, each year the foundation has awarded unrestricted grants to nonprofit agencies that serve people living with HIV/AIDS.

“Because we are a small foundation, we were able to quickly have our Board of Directors approve emergency relief grants to our local partners to help them maintain their missions through the pandemic,” says The Campbell Foundation’s Executive Director Ken Rapkin. “These funds helped staff work remotely and reach their clients, provided needed food assistance, mental health services, and myriad other day-to-day needs in our community.

Unlike some other funders that have shifted their donations to COVID-19, the foundation has stayed the course. Recognizing that there would be a significant drop both in grants to researchers and donations to organizations focused on HIV/AIDS, the foundation ramped up its efforts approving emergency relief grants to local partners to help them maintain their missions throughout the pandemic.

In addition, the foundation’s research funding continues to support its mission—to discover better treatments for people living with HIV, as well as funding cure research.

In April, The Campbell Foundation awarded a \$90,000 grant to a pair of researchers investigating why cardiovascular disease (CVD) is significantly more prevalent among people living with HIV-1 than among those in the general population. The recipients were Teresa H. Evering, MD, an infectious disease specialist and assistant professor of medicine in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Weill Cornell Medicine, and Jonathan N. Tobin, Ph.D., a cardiovascular epidemiologist, President/CEO at Clinical Directors Network (CDN), a practice-based

research network, and Senior Epidemiologist at The Rockefeller University Center for Clinical and Translational Science.

Evering and Tobin propose using the wealth of clinical data available in Healthix, the largest public Health Information Exchange in the nation, serving New York City and Long Island, to determine whether certain markers can identify those people living with HIV who are at a higher risk of heart disease and stroke.

During the past 26 years, The Campbell Foundation has funded a wide range of research around the world. From its first \$15,510 grant into HIV-associated Kaposi sarcoma to its most recent \$90,000 grant in April, the foundation remains committed to helping people with HIV live better lives until there is a cure.

Looking ahead, the foundation will be reviewing a grant proposal that will look into the ramifications of long hauler COVID-19 in people living with HIV/AIDS.

“Since we are still learning as we go with COVID, it is imperative that research teams garner valuable data as to the future needs and possible interventions for people living with compromised immune systems and comorbidities that may make the post-COVID experience more difficult to navigate,” says Rapkin.

Susan R. Miller serves as The Campbell Foundation’s public relations consultant.