

University of South Florida picked as HQ for international virus, pandemic research network

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The University of South Florida will be the new headquarters of the Global Virus Network, a coalition of more than 80 virology research centers in 40 countries, as well as home to its co-founder: Robert Gallo, who is credited as one of the co-discoverers of HIV.

At an event announcing the partnership Wednesday, Charles Lockwood,

vice president for USF Health, said he saw the partnership as a way to "expand the role of the university in solving some of society's most pressing health issues."

Lockwood said the partnership would "dramatically increase our ability to collaborate with experts" as well as host seminars, conferences and translate research to practical applications. The Global Virus Network also focuses on [public health education](#) and solutions.

Joining Gallo—who is among the most cited scientists in the world with more than 1,300 publications—will be three research development companies and more virologists. Lockwood saw it as an opportunity to build out a medical district in Channelside—which already includes USF's Heart Institute, College of Medicine, College of Pharmacy and a Tampa General Hospital clinic—and create a "research triangle" of sorts between Moffitt, the main USF campus and the medical campus downtown.

"We think it will become a really dominant force in the world to combat pandemics to foreign disease," he said.

Brett Giroir, executive chair of the network's board, said he volunteered to serve on the board after his time as assistant secretary of health and acting Food and Drug Administration commissioner under former President Donald Trump.

"I understand the critically important role that the GVN can play in national policy in global science and keeping the world bio-safe," he said. "We are interested in health care and public health innovations and practical implementations that help people today, tomorrow, our children and of course those in the future."

Giroir said he worked with Florida officials on a daily basis during his

time with the Trump administration, and said it was a collaborative partnership.

Though Lockwood and USF's health team were involved in the governor's response, with the governor appearing near Lockwood to roll out vaccines, Florida's surgeon general Joseph Ladapo has since called for an end to mRNA-vaccines, and Gov. Ron DeSantis has banned vaccine or mask mandates in schools.

The network's president, Yale-based pediatrician Stan Vermund, said they were aware USF is a state-funded school in Florida, but that the network, registered in Delaware, was independent.

"We will be independent voices for science," he said.

That said, Vermund said, it's important to acknowledge not everything about virology and vaccinology is known.

"We will welcome debate and discussion, other points of view being expressed," he said. "We will take those into account, and we will give our point of view, but we are not afraid of open debate and discussion."

He added that vaccines have been "a great gift" as a pediatrician.

"We've been able to knock down disease incidence and mortality for many [vaccine-preventable diseases](#) by 99.99% in our country, but one has to acknowledge that vaccines have side effects," Vermund said.

"One needs a thoughtful cost benefit analysis and needs to work with the FDA and vaccine manufacturers to make vaccines as safe and effective as they could possibly be."

Gallo is expected to start in July.

He will develop and lead a center for virology at USF and serve as program leader for Infectious Agents and Oncogenesis at the Tampa General Hospital Cancer Institute, senior scientific advisor to the USF Microbiomes Institute and senior scientific advisor to the Office of the Director of the TGH Cancer Institute.

Gallo is celebrated for his early-'80s work that established HIV as a cause for AIDS, and in the decades since has since helped develop new HIV testing and treatment procedures. He is also credited with the discovery of retroviruses and their association with cancer.

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