Swine flu puts area colleges on alert

By Kavita Kumar
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Only a couple of dozen suspected swine flu cases have been reported at St. Louis area colleges so far, but universities are on heightened alert.

St. Louis University has set up an off-campus "recovery center" where students who become sick with the H1N1 virus can be isolated from their roommates and other people in their residence halls.

Washington University plans to clean residence hall bathrooms more thoroughly and will ask sick students to wear a mask when leaving their rooms. The school has ordered 500 thermometers and is stock-piling Tamiflu. It also may have resident advisers deliver meals to sick students' rooms so they don't risk infecting other students in the cafeterias.

And Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is asking professors to be more lenient with class attendance policies and to put more class materials online so sick students can keep up with coursework.

Colleges and universities across the country are taking such actions because young people — between ages 5 and 24 — appear to be the most susceptible to swine flu and account for the largest percentage of illnesses to date.

Campuses have been planning for a heavier-than-normal flu season since the summer. They are asking students, staff and faculty who contract the flu to stay home.

The University of Missouri-Columbia had about 50 students who appear to have swine flu contact the student health center last week. The school has continued to field many calls and visits from newly infected students this week.

Washington U. didn't have any reported cases of H1N1 as of Thursday afternoon. But students who show up at the school's student health center with a cough or other flu-like symptom are immediately given a mask and taken to a special area where they are examined.

"We're being very conservative," said Dr. Alan Glass, director of the health center. "We're prepared for it. We certainly know it will come eventually."

Thus far, the swine flu is acting similar to the seasonal flu in terms of its contagiousness and severity. Most people who get it do not need treatment and do not become seriously ill. But like the seasonal flu, there have been deaths related to the swine flu. In most cases, the victims had underlying medical conditions.

Flu cases in Missouri hospitals doubled this week, state health officials said Thursday. Flu symptoms now account for about 4 percent of emergency room
visits, compared with 2 percent on average. The spike is linked to the start of the school year, officials said, because young people in close contact can facilitate the spread of the virus.

A voluntary survey by the American College Health Association found about 1,640 reported swine flu cases at 165 colleges last week.

One of the challenges for college campuses is that many students come from far away — sometimes halfway around the world — to study. Students live on campus in crowded residence halls and eat at bustling cafeterias, making it difficult for them to "go home" and isolate themselves from others if they get sick.

That’s why SLU is using part of a building it uses for retreats and overflow student housing as a place for students who become sick. Health personnel will staff the center 24 hours a day. A public safety official will also be on hand. One or two students have briefly stayed there so far.

Nearly all of the 24 SLU students suspected of having H1N1 have gone to their parents’ homes to recover. One sick student is staying in a private room on campus, a university spokesman said.

Washington U. also has identified a number of empty residence hall rooms — including many on the same floor — for sick students if they have a roommate and need more seclusion.

MU has asked students to call the health center instead of just showing up if they are sick. Flu-stricken students could infect other students as they travel to the health center, said Christian Basi, a university spokesman. But the students with flu-like symptoms who do go there in person now have a separate waiting room so they don’t expose other students to the illness.

The Columbia campus’s dining services department has put together "get-well packs" with soup, crackers, clear soda, a fruit cup and granola bars that friends can pick up and take to sick students.

The school also is encouraging professors to use new technology that allows them to post their lectures online so students who fall ill can stay on top of their classes, Basi said.

Some universities are asking students to notify them so they can try to track how prevalent the illness is on campus. But MU is no longer counting the number of students who become sick, in part because many students will self-medicate or go to health clinics off-campus. Still, Basi said that staff in residence halls and professors of large lecture classes are monitoring the situation to see whether the school needs to take additional steps.

Many schools are putting up posters on campus urging students to wash their hands frequently and advising them on proper coughing etiquette — cough into a tissue, then throw the tissue away. Colleges are ordering more bottles of hand sanitizer to place in busy hallways, residence halls and computer labs. And they also are signing up to get the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available in
mid-October.

School officials are following recommendations of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which suggests that students, faculty and staff stay home until 24 hours after the fever subsides without the use of medicine. The CDC also suggests that schools not require a doctor's note to confirm illnesses because doctor's offices may be busy and may not be testing for swine flu.

If the situation becomes more severe, the CDC recommends colleges consider taking more drastic measures such as suspending sporting events or canceling classes.

Donald McDonald, SIUE's director of emergency management and safety, said he wants college students, who do not traditionally get very sick during flu season, not to shrug off the heightened concerns this year.

"We're trying to tell them to take it more seriously and to follow safety precautions," he said. "But don't panic. It's one of those situations where we need to remain calm."

Blythe Bernhard of the Post-Dispatch contributed to this report.

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University of Missouri licensing revenue hits $10 million
Antacid, medical devices, biofuels power university’s drive to $50 million goal

St. Louis Business Journal - by Anjei Mueller and Rob Hurt

The University of Missouri’s technology transfer program topped $10 million in licensing income for the first time ever.

System President Gary Forsee has even bigger things in mind. His goal is $50 million in licensing income in the next five years for the group that moves discoveries made on campus to the private sector.

Forsee is putting his money where his mouth is, dedicating increased resources to the tech transfer programs while cuts are being made in other departments. The system — which includes campuses in Columbia, St. Louis, Rolla and Kansas City — is adding an additional tech liaison position at each campus.

In addition, UM hired Anthony Harris on July 1 to provide marketing services for medical devices and technologies developed on its four campuses. The tech transfer office also hopes to add marketing professionals in the life science and engineering fields to court potential licensing deals.

Ambitious goal

Hitting the $50 million mark would put UM just behind the giants of technology transfer. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) generated $75.5 million in 2009 income from its licensing office, and Stanford University reported $63.9 million in 2008.

Replicating that type of activity would be difficult for most universities, according to Washington University Chancellor Mark Wrighton, who previously worked for 23 years at MIT. He also chaired the National Academy of Sciences’ Committee on the Management of University Intellectual Property.

“MIT has a long, strong record in science and engineering and an exceptionally large research portfolio,” he said. “Most universities don’t have that or the culture of moving new discoveries into the marketplace.”

But Mike Nichols, vice president of research and economic development for the UM system, thinks the $50 million goal is within reach. He points out that the system has nearly doubled its licensing income almost every year over the past five years. Licensing revenue has increased 300 percent since UM brought in $2.6 million in 2004.

“We haven’t seen any slowing down,” Nichols said.

UM’s 2009 licensing income rose nearly 55 percent from $6.7 million in 2008.

The bulk of the ’09 revenue, nearly $10.1 million, came from the Columbia campus. The St. Louis campus had one deal last year that generated income, with Deerfield, Ill.-based Alltech Associates, Inc., a maker of equipment that separates, identifies and quantifies compounds for chemists.

“I think Missouri has made great progress in getting to that level,” said Brad Castanho, co-director of the office of technology management and assistant vice chancellor of research at Washington University. “You’ll find very few universities that got to that level.”

Washington University earned $17 million in 2008 royalties, a 40.5 percent increase from the $12.1 million it earned in 2007. The university doesn’t have final 2009 numbers yet. Castanho said the university’s licensing income has hovered in the $10 million to $12 million range for the last five years, but jumped to the $17 million mark last year due to a one-time payment on a single technology, which Castanho declined to identify.

The University of Missouri saw a similar spike to $9.1 million in fiscal year 2005 thanks to a one-time payment and a liquidation of stock received under a license agreement.

Medical devices have accounted for the system’s top returns over the past five years. Examples of university technologies that show promise of generating more money include:
The university signed an agreement with a regenerative medicine company, Organovo Inc., on technology related to organ printing, which hopes to one day use the same technology as an ink-jet printer to "print" organs for transplant in humans.

The university partnered with Massachusetts-based Allied Minds to create a start-up, LifeScreen Inc., led by three MU researchers who are working on a new approach to detecting breast cancer.

Another researcher and his team formed Greemano Company, which aims at synthetically producing nanoparticles without creating a negative environmental impact.

Medical vaccines have yielded strong returns for Saint Louis University, which brought in $3.1 million in royalties in fiscal 2009, said Maurice Foxworth, director of the office of innovation and intellectual property at Saint Louis University. The tech transfer program's claim to fame is Dr. Richard Bucholz's surgery navigation system, the StealthStation.

Foxworth said licensing revenue has increased slowly in recent years, but the university is in the process of increasing its research capacity.

Deal flow

UM's investment in patents to protect potentially licensable technology also continues to increase, with its net patent expenses topping $1 million for the first time in fiscal 2009.

In both fiscal 2008 and 2009, UM filed for a total of 98 U.S. patents, up 55.6 percent from 63 in 2004.

And more patents are prompted by more ideas, as can be seen in the growing number of disclosures coming into the tech transfer offices. Faculty members file a disclosure with the tech transfer office to notify it that they have an invention that may be marketable, including information such as a description of the invention, the date of conception and the funding that went into development. The tech transfer office then evaluates the disclosures for technical merit, marketability and patentability.

In fiscal 2009, faculty members filed 161 disclosures, up 71 percent from the 94 filed in 2004.

All of these numbers add up to more licensing deals, which, according to Nichols, is where the rubber really meets the road — when an established company is willing to bet on an emerging university technology.

"When I was back on the campus a couple years ago, the first thing I did was put a high premium on doing deals," said Nichols, who served as director of the office of technology management for the University of Missouri-Columbia before taking on the role of leading research and economic development efforts for the system in 2007. "We're making that a higher priority. We're finding those licenses early, getting the word out and networking with the licensing associates."

The efforts appear to be paying off, with a record 71 licenses or options signed in fiscal 2009, up more than threefold from the 20 license deals in 2004.

Even after a licensing deal is signed, it takes time for it to turn into money in the bank. For example, more than 200 licensing deals have been signed by the university system in the past decade, but only 11 licenses contributed to the $10.4 million in income generated last year.

In fact, much of that total was generated by one license — for the antacid Zegerid, which is produced by San Diego-based Santarus Inc. Fiscal 2009 licensing income from Santarus included a $2.5 million payment to the university system prompted by Zegerid exceeding a sales milestone.

UM expects more great things from Santarus, a public company that reported $34.8 million in revenue for the first quarter of 2009. Last year, Santarus signed a licensing agreement with Schering-Plough HealthCare Products Inc. to develop an over-the-counter version of Zegerid.

"Which means you'll see it at Wal-Mart and Sam's and pharmacies all over the world," Nichols said. "The market they address is going to go up quite a bit, and we feel good that the income is going to continue to increase."

Return on investment

It's not unusual for a handful of licenses to account for a lion's share of a university's royalty income.

"Of all the deals you do, you only need about 10 percent of those to really be home runs," Nichols said. "That's a pretty good return on investment."

It's a similar story at Washington University, where a few medical technologies have accounted for most of the money generated.

"If we looked at our revenue stream, you could probably point to five to 10 technologies bringing in most of the money," Castanho said. "We have hundreds of licenses. Most of them are quite small."
The university’s biggest money maker has been a diagnostic tool for heart attacks. The patent on the technology, which was licensed nonexclusively to five or six companies, expired two years ago, causing a slight dip in royalty revenue.

Washington University typically inks 40 to 50 licensing deals each year, but Castanho expects that number to drop this year as the economy and consolidation in the life sciences industry prompts companies to rein in spending on licenses.

Foxworth said some of the startup companies that SLU has licensed technology to in the past are having a difficult time making ends meet, much less investing money in additional licensing deals.

“It’s a difficult environment in which to raise money, and some companies are working just to make it through these difficult times,” Foxworth said.

However, Scott Uhlmann, director of the office of intellectual property administration for the University of Missouri, thinks the economic slowdown could work in the university’s favor.

“As companies are forced to scale back R&D budgets and staff, we hope they might look to oursource their R&D to the university in a sense,” Uhlmann said. “We see a lot of opportunities.”

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Few UM financial complaints prompt action

25 grievances have been filed.

By Janese Heavin

Thursday, September 3, 2009

Advertisement

A University of Missouri System reporting line has generated allegations of fiscal misconduct but has resulted in little action.

Since the fiscal misconduct reporting system went online in December 2007, 25 reports of misconduct throughout the four-campus system have been filed. Of those, four prompted the system to take some sort of corrective action, although details of those actions were not disclosed.

The UM System launched the fiscal misconduct reporting line to allow employees to anonymously file complaints if they suspect financial foul play. UM pays a third party, Global Compliance, $6,600 a year to operate the program, said Nilufer Joseph, director of financial services.

Here’s how it works: An employee who suspects fiscal misconduct makes a report by calling a telephone hot line or filling out an online form available through the UM System’s Web site. Global Compliance alerts UM administrators about the complaint, and UM delegates an internal investigation to the administrative office on whichever campus the report originates. That administrative office then deems whether action is necessary.

Most investigations have taken about three weeks to complete, according to a list of the reports acquired by the Tribune through an open-records request.

UM administrators took action on these four reports:

- A complaint that UM System employees accepted entertainment tickets from a vendor they were in negotiations with.

- A concern that a UM-St. Louis employee used his office’s Web page to link to a relative’s business.
• A complaint that a full-time employee at the St. Louis campus was working at an off-campus location not related to his or her university job.

• A report that a UM-Kansas City student misused a university-supplied procurement card.

System administrators would not provide further details about these reports or say what actions were taken in these cases, citing personnel issues.

One complaint, reported in July, is still under investigation. That allegation accuses an MU division of failing to administer federal funds properly, losing grant awards and using poor accounting practices. The person who reported the charge also claimed employees in the division fear for their jobs.

UM Chief of Staff David Russell would not specify which division the complaint refers to, only that it’s a unit of campus administration.

In 17 instances, system administrators concluded that action wasn’t necessary. The majority of those complaints, 11 of the 17, came from the MU campus. Many accused fellow employees of falsifying timesheets and expense accounts. However, in most cases, action wasn’t taken because the allegation proved inaccurate, Joseph said.

In three cases, employees reporting the concerns did not provide enough information to investigate and declined to answer further questions.

Overall, Joseph said, the reporting system is operating as expected and that the response is comparable to that at other universities that use fiscal misconduct lines.

It’s unclear how widely known the system is, though. Tom Phillips, former chairman of MU’s Faculty Council, said he was vaguely aware of the reporting line but that it is not something the council has discussed.

“It’s not been on our radar,” he said. “That’s not to say it’s not a valuable tool; I just don’t know much about it.”

Joseph said she’s not sure the system has uncovered anything that has saved UM money, but it might help deter employees from trying to cheat the system.

“I think it has a lot of value,” she said. “It provides an alternative outlet for individuals to report misconduct if they don’t feel they can go through normal university channels. ... We’re strongly committed to protecting the financial resources of the university and allowing the individual to report potential misconduct if they think they’ve seen it.”

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.
Mizzou gets $16.3M in stimulus

To date, University of Missouri researchers have been awarded $16.3 million in stimulus funding for 36 projects in areas such as human health, education and agriculture.

And the university expects to receive even more.

“This money is creating jobs right now that are needed to support this research, but also has the potential to create long-term jobs upon the discovery of new technologies to improve the quality of life in many different areas,” Rob Duncan, vice chancellor for research, said in a statement Thursday. “As the funds continue to be released, we expect several other proposals to win funding.”

Some of current awards include:

- $981,000 to the MU Swine Research Center for a study to explore using genetically modified pigs for organ-transplant studies.
- $707,404 to Helen Mullen, professor of immunology and rheumatology in the School of Medicine, to study excess fibrous tissue growth (fibrosis) that occurs in the thyroid and other organs in some autoimmune diseases.
- $430,000 to Hao Li, an assistant professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering, to study how nanoparticles might be used in joint replacements.
- $50,304 to Stefanos Sarafianos, assistant professor of molecular microbiology and immunology and researcher at the Christopher S. Bond Life Sciences Center, to study multi-drug resistant HIV.

In the last fiscal year, 2008-09, MU researchers won more than $230 million in grants and contracts.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Outlook on new student e-mail still shaky

MU students continue to have problems with Outlook Live.

BY JORDAN ZIRM
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Two weeks into the start of the school year, students and MU officials are still experiencing problems with the transition to a new e-mail system.

Over the summer, MU switched its e-mail system from Microsoft Outlook Web Access to Microsoft Office Outlook Live. Terry Robb, the university's director of the Division of Information Technology, said the change was necessary for increasing memory and saving money.

Students now have 10 gigabytes of space, compared with the 40 megabytes on the former e-mail system. But the transition to the new e-mail system has gone anything but smoothly. Complaints included the inability to link new e-mail to an existing e-mail account and mail automatically going into a junk-mail folder.

Creating an Outlook Live account has proved difficult for some students. When students began to set up their account, they were given a temporary password to link their old e-mail accounts to their new ones. This password doesn't always work, which junior Tom Eytchison has experienced. A week into school, Eytchison had yet to set up his new account.

"When I try to create my username, (MU) gives me a new password, but when I try to put my password in it says it isn't registered, even though I just created it," Eytchison said.

"It definitely isn't dumb-proof," Junior Lauren Morrison tried to activate her account and encountered problems. "It took two days for (Outlook Live) to recognize my username and password," she said.

Once students create their usernames and passwords for Outlook Live, new e-mails are automatically rerouted to that account. As a result, Morrison did not receive any new e-mails for the two days her account was frozen.

"Some students are not familiar with how IT systems work, and they may be having technical step-by-step problems," Robb said. Kevin Bailey, director of customer service and support, said the division has 4,000 students left to switch to Outlook Live. The division has an unofficial deadline of October to get the remaining students over to the new system.

Students having problems with the new system are encouraged to call the help desk at 882-5000 or to go to help.missouri.edu.