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Professor Terence Seemungal speaking at news conference (Photo: CMC)

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PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad (CMC)— The University of the West Indies (UWI) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) are collaborating on a large international project examining options for drugs in treating the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that has killed more than 200,000 people and infected more than three million others worldwide.

Dean of the faculty of Medical Sciences at the St Augustine campus of the UWI, Professor Terence Seemungal, speaking at the daily news conference of the Ministry of Health here, said that the WHO has come up with a study, titled 'Solidarity'.

“This is a large international trial that will be looking at options for therapy. It is proposed that the study be done throughout the countries in which the University of the West Indies ...and that will be Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Jamaica and the Bahamas,” Seemungal said.

“We have a committee across the four countries that is chaired by one of our colleagues, Professor Marvin Reid of the Mona Campus (Jamaica),” he added.

He told reporters that apart from its international design, the study will also examine four therapeutic options, namely Remdesivir, which was originally developed as an Ebola treatment, Ritonavir, an oral medication that is used for treating human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection as well as Interferon, which is used to treat various cancers and hydroxychloroquine used to treat and prevent malaria.

He said these drugs will be used “versus standard care or usual care whatever that is in the country in which the study is being done”.

Seemungal said that patients will be given the opportunity of enrolling in the study “and if they say yes, they will have to sign a consent form and of course further information will be given to them.

“The study compares these drugs against what we call the usual care or standard of care and if someone opts to go into the study they cannot say which line of treatment they must get. It is what we call randomised and the randomization process is done by the WHO,” Seemungal added.

“We hope that after this study there will be clear evidence as to which of these drugs will help in the treatment of COVID-19,” he said.

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