Creativity in Times of Uncertainty
AAMC collected over two hundred 55-word stories and poems that capture healthcare professionals’ and trainees’ experiences in the face of the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice in 2020-2021
Creativity in Times of Uncertainty

In 2020 and 2021, in partnership with StoryCorps, The Good Listening Project, and the National Endowment for the Arts, the AAMC created a way for physicians, residents, and medical students to reflect on the uncertainty surrounding the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice.

Health professionals were asked to submit poetry or 55-word stories, to take part in a listening session from The Good Listening Project, or to conduct a video interview using StoryCorps tools. Over the XX months of this project, there were hundreds of contributions to this story sharing project. Some prevailing themes of these contributions were disconnection, hope and gratitude, and grief and loss.

The article “Bearing Witness: Storytelling by Healthcare Professionals and Learners During Times of Uncertainty” describes the project in more detail. In addition to the poetry and 55-word stories in this document, you can access submissions through The Good Listening Project’s podcast and books; and the condensed and full-length versions of videos housed in the Storycorps AAMC collection.

The AAMC wishes to express appreciation for the National Endowment for the Arts, who made this project possible, as well as for the healthcare staff and professionals who dedicated themselves to caring for others in the face of uncertainty. We extend our sympathies to all those who suffered and lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to racial injustice.
**Are You OK?**

Minneapolis is eighty miles away, so these events literally hit close to home. As a black man, it can be uncommon for others to be concerned about my safety. Many of my colleagues asked how they can show solidarity. I am grateful for these bright lights during this dark moment in our country’s history.

*Suliman EL-Amin*
Fellow
*Mayo Clinic*
*August 31, 2021*

**The Cry of My Heart**

Can you tell me how to grieve in a pandemic? Everyone is different; do self-care, they say.

But what if self-care is being with those I love? Whom I dearly loved I have lost. How could I risk bringing the virus to others beloved? I am grieving but cannot grieve. Because I love you.

*Tiffany M. Shin, MD*
Faculty Member
*July 29, 2021 – not on John’s list but on website*

**A Sad Eyed Woman**

A sad eyed woman speaks to an procession of hearers, who think their boredom is hidden by masks and goggles. Halting conversation is passed through a phone while minds wander.

Gregory Plemmons
Faculty Member
*Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt*
*March 4, 2021*

**I See You**

I see you
Trying your best to smile, hoping the news’ not too bad.
I see you
Holding the phone so tight your knuckles blanch, anxiously waiting for me to get to the point.
I see you
Hear the test results, gasping in disappointment, then the sobbing. Quiet.
I see you
Because I’m human too.

Evelyn Ilori, PhD
Student
*Case Western Reserve University*
*March 4, 2021*

**Partial Craniectomy**

Two weeks into the quarantine, and the teenager’s recovering from a bout of bacterial meningitis he contracted before everything happened. He’s finally doing better. “This feels normal now,” the mother says, gesturing to the slender tubing snaking from his cranium. “I wish the rest of the world felt the same way.”

**Dementia**

MY BRILLIANT, BEAUTIFUL, WIFE IS DISAPPEARING STRICKEN FRONTOTEMPORAL DEMENTIA NOW I AM ALONE, CAN I HELP OTHERS AND COMFORT? HOW CAN I CARE WHEN I AM ALONE? I NEED TO BE LOVED AS I WALK THE LONELY PATH TO MY DEATH HOPE GROWS I WILL FIND LOVE AGAIN ENERGY WILL RETURN I WILL HEAL OTHERS.

Gerald Lazarus, MD
Faculty Member
*June 22, 2021*

**Partial Craniectomy**

Two weeks into the quarantine, and the teenager’s recovering from a bout of bacterial meningitis he contracted before everything happened. He’s finally doing better. “This feels normal now,” the mother says, gesturing to the slender tubing snaking from his cranium. “I wish the rest of the world felt the same way.”

Kylan Larsen, MS
Student
*July 29, 2021*
Have You Been Here Before?

I ask the grey-hared white woman as she enters the clinic next to Dave’s Mercado. “No, I live across town,” she mumbles through her mask. She fumbles to roll up the sleeve of her beautiful red sweater. “I’m a little nervous.” Me too I think to myself before I jab her arm.

Nikki E. Rossetti, MS Student
Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine
March 4, 2021

The Things I’ve Learned

I’ve learned to smile with my eyes
So they can see that I have a soul.
I’ve learned that a moment of silence,
A reflection of the things that we hold dear,
Will allow us to proceed with purpose.
I’ve learned we’re more alike than we’d like to think.
We all want to be loved.

Miki Calderon
Student
February 5, 2021

A Blessing in Disguise

To pursue my dreams
While evolving from old wounds
To pursue my dreams
While evolving from old wounds
Stoics had known best
Master loneliness they said
The grace of being
Forced to confront inner worlds
For those in training
Must learn to heal themselves too.

Christina LaGamma
Student
Penn State College of Medicine
February 5, 2021

June

315,000+ dead.
You yearn to escape unscathed as daylight erodes the bleakest night.
Vaccines on the horizon met with a foreign feeling-Hope.
But it is too late. She is gone.
Empty promises of protection proved fallible because even wildflowers wilt in the sun.
She died alone. A numbing statistic.

Lauren Moore
Student
TCU and UNTHSC School of Medicine
February 5, 2021

Invisible Enemy

From the shadows of healthcare, we rise. Now on the front stage.
Science and planning on a moment’s notice have collided...
With a hidden enemy at our door, lives are lost in a battle of time.

Sharing

I catch her eye when she falters,
brow furrowed beneath breath-blurred plastic goggles
a pause at the sudden tears – and then she wraps his inconsolable in white coat arms,
navy spots blossoming on sky blue fabric – a reminder that pain can melt us together just as much as it pushes us apart.

Haorui Sun, BS Student
Pennsylvania State College of Medicine
February 5, 2021
Steadfast and determined, we will not fail.

Jason Stalling, MBA
Administrator
Eastern Virginia Medical School
January 5, 2021

Duty

I read about it
Not sure if it can affect us
Few days go by
People now ask me
I am supposed to know
What it is
How to prevent
How to treat
To be a fronterliner
Stop
Take a breath
It’s ok to be scared
But then,
I have to move on and help.

Niyati Grewal, MBBS
Student
Manipal College of Medical Sciences
January 5, 2021

Who remembers to call the family?

Four hours after the surgery should have ended, my mother paced anxiously.
“Should I call?” Not allowed in the hospital, we received no updates during the procedure. “They’ll call if something is wrong.” “I don’t want to annoy the doctors.” Grandma was already in recovery, it turned out. No one had bothered to tell us.

Allison Neeson, BS
Student
Tufts University School of Medicine
January 5, 2021

Pandemic Yell

I’ve developed a new appreciation for my own voice – a scream so forceful it took me by surprise. I called it my “pandemic yell”. I recorded it and listened to it over and over again. It was exhilarating to hear and feel the rage inside burst its way out finally. I made it my ringtone.

Mimi Lam, DVM, CCFP, Dip.Path
Faculty Member
Harvard Medical School
January 5, 2021

For Months

Four Months
Watching charts, statistics, news commentators
Wondering where my place was in this strange new world of
Staying home, begging relatives to
My first day back in the hospital
Realizing the cost
In fear, in loneliness, in too-early goodbyes
But I know

With hope and courage
We are finding brightness
And brighter days ahead.

Emily Marra, BA
Student
Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine
January 5, 2021

A Month of Haikus

A new month begins, pandemic continues, I long for an end. Writer’s block struggles, so I puzzle with haikus for poetry month. Disobedient dreams haunt my subconscious. I can’t escape COVID. A month of haikus, finger counting syllables, what will mark days now?

Trisha K. Paul
Resident
University of Minnesota
January 4, 2021
ICU Redux

She looks the same, despite many years.
Still young and still tired as she was in 2005, when I met her and her son.
His story a tapestry weaving through so many ICU rooms since that day.
Recognition hits us.
She points out his “first” room.
A sudden hug, ignoring masks.
I don’t pull away.

Wynne Morrison, MD, MBE
Faculty Member
Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
January 4, 2021

Family Time

School is now virtual, her kids are always home
Jobs are now uncertain, her livelihood a slippery prize
They say quarantine, they say family time
Her black eye and bruises, “just new make-up tricks mummy is trying out”
She holds them tight, her tiny little kids
Too young to already know the sounds of abuse

Jane-Frances Aruma
Student
Penn State College of Medicine
December 18, 2020

Thank You Corona!

You helped me realize life isn’t all about living nor death about dying.
Every death is but a reminder of what I yet need to let die within me. And I die a little when someone else dies too to in let the new life while still alive.
Your tough love made me more humane!

Sailaja Devaguptapu
Senior Research Officer
Indian Institute of Health Management Research University
December 18, 2020

My Pandemic Baby

She didn’t know she was being, born in a pandemic, a world where there would be no faces.
Where smiles wont prevail.

Saba Fatima, MD
Faculty Member
Kansas University School of Medicine, Wichita
December 18, 2020

An Infectious War

Cough, sneeze, sniffle.
Everyone is suspicious. At the grocery store, the bank, the gym. COVID-19 is everywhere. Invisible but ever-present. Waiting to capitalize on the next victim.
Respiratory droplets, aerosolized, on fomites.
There’s no escape from this war. Masks, social distancing, hand washing – our only hopes. We are in this together. We must come together.

Logan Garfield
Student
FIU Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine
December 18, 2020

Isolation

Isolated in my room, I cannot leave
Food and drink are brought to me
My breath is infectious, I must wear a mask
It’s getting lonely in here
My dog cries outside my door
I feel sick, but the sadness of this isolation drowns that
Three more days, one negative result
Freedom is so near

Amanda Rodriguez
Student
Florida International University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine
December 18, 2020

Routine Morning

At home, like always, hunched over my computer clicking through UWorld questions. Our dog curls around my feet to beg for attention and food. Voices drift over from my mom’s phone—another day, another Zoom funeral. Which one?, I think, as I sweep my faceshield and mask into my bag for another clinic half day.

Chioma Ndukwe, MS3
Student
University of Illinois at Chicago
December 18, 2020

Tik tok

Tik. Tok.
Each with a family.
Tik. tok.
An aunt or uncle.
A spouse. A sibling.
Tik. tok.
A friend.
tik. tok.
Every minute, someone dies.
Not just a number, but a person.
Tik. tok.

Each with their own story.
A story cut short.

Kaila Pomeranz, DO
Attending
Tampa, Florida
December 18, 2020

My first stroke patient

“I never want blood!” she writes.

Dara S. Farhadi, BS, MS
Student
University of Arizona College of Medicine-Phoenix
December 18, 2020

Patients of Color #1

Brown like me
Amir and Sarah bounced off the walls of the clinic. I smiled and showed them my stethoscope. Their dad just lost his job and with that went his health insurance. He was grateful for this free clinic. I was grateful he trusted me. They looked just like me and my brother when we were kids.

Roshan Bransden, MS4
Student
FIU HWCOM
November 11, 2020

Patients of Color #2

“Bad black mother”
She’s back again.
It’s her seventh child.
She’s positive for amphetamines, again.
HIV positive, no prenatal care, no insurance.
It’s 2 a.m. The baby is 3 months early.
It’s born — transferred to the NICU.
Mom is discharged.
“We’ll see her again,” my attending shrugs and turns to his computer.
We all failed her.

Roshan Bransden, MS4
Student
FIU HWCOM
November 11, 2020
Despair

Fever, chest pain, shortness of breath. Death
Shackles, choking, gasping. Death
Centuries of invisible, invincible oppression
A tale of contagion and two viruses
For one—tests, treatments, vaccines, fueled by money
For the other—words and more words, running on empty
Change is coming.
Change is coming.
Change is coming today
No change is coming

Nasia Safdar, MD, PhD
Faculty Member
UW-Madison
November 11, 2020

Travel Ban

“Mom, this is not your regular 77th birthday message.
My upbringing, instilled with your trust, faith, and values; I treasure.
We clash, but our relationship is strong and lasting;
’veergeef me’, when I hurt you.
I need you to know how much I love you
in case something happens, and I can’t come home.”

J.M. Monica van de Ridder
Faculty Member
Michigan State University
College of Human Medicine – Spectrum Health
November 11, 2020

White Enough

“Well, we’re just glad we switched to you as her PCP...
Mom’s last doc was too Middle Eastern.”
Wordlessly, I gesture to my name badge: five Arabic syllables next to my white-passing face.
He shifts uncomfortably before leaning forward, determined to make a smooth recovery:
“No, I mean he was like...
Middle Eastern Middle Eastern.”

Samer Muallem
Faculty Member
Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center
November 11, 2020

Not what we know, new hope

Focused in ED code stroke.
Student standing nearby.
Though busy and stressed, I called her over for short teaching. Both very appreciative. Students now not allowed. Not ignoring small opportunities with learners, family, friends that bring joy and purpose. May lose sight of true priorities while busy but don’t know when won’t have them anymore.

Kristie Chu
Fellow
UT Health Science Center at Houston
November 11, 2020

Danger in the Air

We assemble.
Respiratory therapist,
Me
Nurse
He booms,
“1!”
Hold on...
“2!”
I still need to...
“3!”
And with our might our patient’s face suddenly emerges.
Tube disconnects
Machine air abounds
I hold my breath.
In that moment we praise mask and shield.
Before I can blink, our airy captain re-attaches the tube.
I exhale.

Chuma Obineme
Fellow
Emory University Hospital
November 11, 2020
**The Reality of Stay at Home Orders**

He’s ill, but cannot afford to miss work. He wants to quarantine for others’ safety but can’t survive without income. Your hands touch his. Now you’re contaminated. It was easier to pass judgement on his lack of isolation when the virus was abstract. But now, you too, are vulnerable to its hardships. Now you understand.

*Rachel Fields*
*Medical Student*
*Florida International University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine*
*November 11, 2020*

**From Sketchy to Bedside**

I had heard about coronavirus once prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was studying for Step 1 and was watching SketchyMicro. The “Kingdom of SARS” sketch opened with the narrator saying “Coronavirus, it’s not a super high yield virus”. If only the creators knew that this non-high yield virus would end up changing the world.

*Shilpa Ghatnekar*
*Medical Student*
*Tufts University School of Medicine*
*November 11, 2020*

**Phone Calls Make me Angry and Tired**

An ex-wife hearing of imminent death. An interpreter conveys another failed spontaneous breathing trial. Again, a son and daughter ask why he cannot receive convalescent plasma. I lay awake hearing the words of a terrified husband—“you are my doctor, thank you”. I prepare for another day’s sorrow with an open heart and empty soul.

*Noah Rosenberg*
*Medical Student*
*NYU Grossman School of Medicine*
*November 11, 2020*

**Essential**

What keeps the essential workers essential? We the intrahelpers, the holders of space. Lovers of the unloved and unlovable. We the givers of dream transfusions. Volunteer souls. Hope transplants. Social workers donning the same scrubs, the same masks, the same gear. Turning to look into the faces of fear looking into the faces of fear.

*Steven T. Licardi, LMSW*
*Behavioral Health Clinician*
*New River Valley Community Services*
*November 11, 2020*

**For The Kulture**

2020 was supposed to be the year of manifestation. A pandemic shook the table and brought endless devastation. Tragedy took Kobe and Pop Smoke. COVID took my stepfather and the rest of my folk. As humans, we all matter. But all lives can’t matter until black lives matter.

*Tilicea Henry*
*Medical Student*
*Penn State College of Medicine*
*November 11, 2020*

**Ingenuity**

He was tired and wanted to go home. This was his 14th hospitalization in 3 years. He wanted his wife, his bed and his food. We could always do more. He wanted less. The pandemic made everything uncertain. No one was wearing masks yet. But Mr C
did. Cancer might get him, but coronavirus wouldn’t.

R. Michelle Schmidt, MD, MPH
Faculty Member
Baylor College of Medicine
November 11, 2020

Secure unit dialectic

Looming over her, Yellow gown, masked, Breath misting plastic, I barely hear: “I can’t breathe”. Intergenerational despair. “Can I have my clothes?” Crumpled on the mattress, tugging the Baby doll around her, “It’s for safety”, says the white nurse. Stripped of identity Like her ancestors. Isolation again. She hugs herself; No budget for kind words.

Lisa Burback
Academic Psychiatrist
University of Alberta
November 11, 2020

Steel to Skin

You were excited to see me. And I? Your knee. Propofol administered. You called me a king; pride for me was heavier than the shackles removed. I was envious. We did not differ too much. I have been on their treasure hunt for years. Hopefully, one day, I jump through enough hoops to find my keys.

Jason Mascoe
Medical Student
Penn State College of Medicine
November 11, 2020

2020: A Visionless Summer

Summer solace in pandemic solitude.
Are you okay?
I just want you to know…
I don’t understand…
Teach me.
I don’t want to be…
BLM.
Everyone is pr[al]ying.
Different agenda, same power.
I miss my underground freedom.
This newfound love is suffocating me.
Mask off. No more hiding…
Yet, I still can’t breathe.

Jason Mascoe
Medical Student
Penn State College of Medicine
November 11, 2020

Earth-Shattering Career Obstacles

We are sorry, you did not match to any position
Tunnel vision, seasick, mute, colorless world.
Pick up pieces, stand tall, and persevere.
Covid-19 siphon energy, dissolve opportunity.
Covid-19 deaths, screams, financial burden, social isolation.
Covid-19 innovation, virtual togetherness, newfound unity.
Develop dedication, enhance grit, broaden resourcefulness.

I am strong. We are COVID strong.

Joseph Toth
Medical Student
Upstate Medical University
November 11, 2020

July 14, 2020: International Non-Binary People’s Day

I told them my name and preferred pronouns, they responded in kind. “Pleasure to meet you.” They said they volunteered teaching medical students about pronouns And smiled saying, “I’m glad to see it’s working.”

“They are coming in to follow up on their chronic headaches.” I presented to my attending.
“What do you mean they?”

Jason Spicher
Medical Student
Penn State College of Medicine
November 11, 2020

The First Patient

Gaspesing, “Something’s wrong …. lungs” Southern visitor to ER up North. Has COVID-19 arrived here? Frightened, don PPE, too late. Lips quiver behind N95 masks. Family sent home to quarantine, intubated alone. Last words, “Thank you… for what you do….. I hope….. you will be OK” Great compassion. He fights but dies.
It’s not OK.

Alisa Hayes
Faculty Member
Medical College of Wisconsin
November 11, 2020

Act Now

I Can’t Breath. Please Help. COVID-19 or police chokehold.
Emergency Medicine doctors- we see it all. Rush to aid.
Give oxygen, intubate, CT scan, medication?
What can we do? Anything? Powerlessness.
Coronavirus and systemic racism.
We can witness, We can feel, We can give voice to our patients.
Act with what energy and time remains.

Alisa Hayes
Faculty Member
Medical College of Wisconsin
November 11, 2020

Touching patients in the time of COVID-19

It has been opined (by Doctors Osler, Lipkin, Charon, Ofri, and even Dr. Oz) that the “laying on of hands” by the physician during a therapeutic encounter with a patient is critical for establishing rapport and promoting healing; the so-called Loving Touch.
I am fearful that my elbow bumps are not up to the task.

Jeffrey G. Wong, MD (Faculty Member)
Faculty Member
Penn State College of Medicine – University Park Regional Campus
November 11, 2020

The Wake Up Call

The asylum tree whence fell Viands make, the sentry’s woodpile sell
The recrudescing baleful storms let rake
Of the falsity refuge yet seeking, leccy make
Unto the deific call, ever wake?
The Self unto the self else forsake?
The rolling fickle billow like, not rise and fall
Heed thou ergo the prodding Parnassian wake-up call!

Sailaja Devaguptapu
Senior Researcher
IIHMR University
November 11, 2020

Rinse and Repeat

Wake up, get up, login, treat
Hear their stories
Uncertainty, oppression, chaos, defeat
Fearful eyes, painful voices
Gulping reality one sip at a time like scalding coffee
Listen, support, find common ground
Fatigue rising, shields engaging, boundaries setting
Wake up, get up, login, treat

Israel M. Labao, MD, MPH
Resident
University of Wisconsin-Madison
November 3, 2020

Pandemic

Do you have a fever?
No
Do you have any shortness of breath or trouble breathing?
No
Do you have any changes in your taste or smell?
No
Do you have any symptoms you want to talk about?
No
Do you have any questions for me?
My test came back positive, should I be worried?

Jiajun Li
Student
Florida International University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine
November 3, 2020

Masked

The world had changed
The masks I only used to see in the hospital
Are now commonplace in public
Everyone thinks so much is hidden behind the mask
But from experience, I know It’s not as different as it seems
I can see still their smiles in their eyes

Jiajun Li
Student
Florida International University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine
November 3, 2020

Virtual Connections

Apart but still together
These connections already exist
We were just afraid to try something different until there is no alternative
Some say there’s no replacement for the face-to-face
Some say the connection is weak
Not real, as its name would imply
But it turns out
Sometimes, an imitation
A Virtual connection is good enough

Jiajun Li
Student
Florida International
University Herbert Wertheim
College of Medicine
November 3, 2020

This is Recovery

“Most people recover” they say “This virus is no big deal.”
I see recovered COVID patients everyday; heart failure, kidney failure, liver injury, pulmonary embolisms.
Do people know? That this is recovery.
I drive home past packed restaurants and bars.
The hospital is full. So where will these people go when they are recovering?

Amanda F. Tompkins
Medical Student
University of Colorado School of Medicine
November 3, 2020

The Song and The Breath

Breath bestows a voice to song,
But song was in the air,
Then captured by the wings
That beat as long as they could bear.
As beauty is carried in body,
So song is carried in breath;
in time, when breath has ceased then, know
The song has already left.

Alexander Thomas
Medical Student
Sidney Kimmel Medical College
November 3, 2020

Happiness Reset 2020

Vacation “Home” for vacation,
Working in, for, and from “home.”
Cooking added dopamine in dishes,
Cleaning is a new mindfulness.
“Zoom” is a new craving,
“Facetime” with family and friends is my free CBT,
“Old Fashioned” “New Yorker” “Netflix” are chips of micro-happiness,
Ongoing systole for hedonic treadmill
is now replaced with COVIDiastole.
“COVID” is a “Midas touch.”

Vijay Rajput
Faculty Member
Nova Southeastern University, Dr. Kiran C.Patel College of Allopathic Medicine
November 3, 2020

Day After Day After Day

Up before dawn
Head strong
The weight of a heavy coat
Upon her shoulders
The weight of daily suffering
Entrenched in her heart
Peeling away layers
Exposes deeply etched scars
Left behind by this life of service
The head knows it’s true
The heart pretends it will pass
The scars tell a different story

Kimberley Williamson
Registered Nurse
UWHealth
November 3, 2020

Boston Hope Music

When the pandemic struck, we were stopped in our tracks. Is music still relevant?
Are the arts still relevant?
Then the melodies began flowing again. Music is never silenced. We played together again to bring wellness to Covid patients and to restore wellness in ourselves. A way of healing, giving back, restoring our disrupted world.

Lisa Wong
Faculty Member
Harvard Medical School
November 3, 2020

Unsettled Entrance

March 2020 was a cold and uneasy time. We arrived to the hospital with no one in the hallways, only a screener to greet us on the frontlines. “Do you have any fever, cough, or shortness of breath?” No symptoms, sir. “Any contacts with someone with COVID19?” I don’t know, we do not have testing.

Juliette Perzhinsky, MD, MSc
Faculty Member
Central Michigan University College of Medicine
November 3, 2020

My Frontline

I don’t work in the ER. Nor in the ICU. The traditional “COVID frontline,” displayed on CNN, is not my daily experience. January was routine medication checks. March became crisis management, keeping stable depression and paranoia in a depressed and paranoid pandemic. I don’t work on traditional “frontlines,” but mental health frontlines hurt too.

Marissa Flaherty, MD
Faculty Member
University of Maryland School of Medicine
November 3, 2020

What Am I Missing?

Why do your lungs still look like this? Why does your heart still race like this? What am I missing? Who are you behind these closed eyes? How do I prepare your family for the cries? What am I missing? I see you every day yet feel you drifting further away. What am I missing?

Elena Zamora
Resident
UT Houston
November 3, 2020

In The Shadow of the Pandemic

Diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, cancer. Think of disease, what comes to mind? In Pandemics, we are forced to ration access to care. With masks and protective equipment, we combat a virus. But has this increased vigilance, made us partially blind. A scourge still overlooked by society,

Substance use disorder, so many still suffering and dying.

Rebecca Hamburger
Student
Kultaj Kaleka, RN
Faculty Member
Juliette Perzhinsky, MD, MSc
Faculty Member
Central Michigan University College of Medicine
November 3, 2020

The Veteran’s Wife

On worn waiting room chairs, I held her thin, papery hand- gold band secured between arthritic knots. “No, you can’t stay with him. No visitors.” Isolation, protocol, pandemic- excuses that could not excuse tearing apart the decades of tucked midnight embraces. Milky halos encompassing the blueness of her eyes. A blink, a departure, alone.

Rebecca Tuttle, MD, MS
Faculty Member
Portland VA Medical Center
November 3, 2020

Presentation

I have no idea, It could be, It is most likely, Presentation is most consistent with. You could have, You might have, You are at risk for, You are diagnosed with. We suggest, We recommend, We will order, We prescribed.
Anything else I can help you with,
Do you have any questions...
How are you?

Hannah Mulvey Ferrera
Medical Student
Emory University School of Medicine
November 3, 2020

First day of school

The box arrives after dark.

Benjamin French
Medical Student
Emory University School of Medicine
November 3, 2020

One in a Million

POSITIVE.

The national numbers have reached one million.
Days pass, my birthday in quarantine
My daughter sends a cake. I celebrate being okay.

Karen Szauter
Administrator
University of Texas Medical Branch
November 3, 2020

A Brief Reminder

“I’m a fighter,” she says, blisters across expanses of skin, like the illness is trying to climb its way out.
“Remember this: surround yourself with the right people. Because I didn’t.”
Later, I stand on my balcony, alone. My hands are full, people I love available at the swipe of a finger. The world spins.

Jennifer Li
Medical Student
Emory University School of Medicine
November 3, 2020

The Hoax

Stone-faced and somber, the new patient sat behind the partition with an untrusting glare. “Are you scared I’m gonna choke you?” “No sir, just trying to keep us both safe from the virus”. “Oh, that hoax everyone keeps talking about”? One side of his mouth curls upwards in amusement. Just another day in forensic psychiatry.

Scott Leary, MS4
Medical Student

When Bees Swarm

We can no longer stay here. It is not right.
Being treated by a different standard for bringing my own PPE.
But I want to protect myself, my patients, and my family. Am I really doing wrong by advocating during a pandemic?
I want to fly with my swarm, but where are they?

Juliette Perzhinsky, MD, MSc
Faculty Member
Central Michigan University College of Medicine
October 29, 2020

Auscultation

An unexpected gift, inadvertent sounds from unmuted classmates—rhythms like palpitations as a car drives past his window, a quiet voice asks what time she’d like dinner, the stuttering of a chair pulled closer to the table, fluttering of flipped pages, skittering steps of pets;
the small intimacies of our virtuality

Elizabeth Jakubowski
Medical Student
Wayne State University
School of Medicine
October 29, 2020

Back to work

“You must be frontline”
With guilt
“I am doing televisits for now”
The hospital is eerie and quiet outside
Once inside
You forget
Residents crowd together
Affording comfort
And normalcy
You stand close to an upset father
To explain and assuage
On your way home
You are haunted by his maskless face

Madhura Pradhan, MD
Faculty Member
The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
October 29, 2020

Can You See It?

We give each other company, Fear and I
Sometimes in the absence of others,
Sometimes in a room so full, you cannot see your own feet
Fear can take a lifetime to wrangle away
But one moment, one instance
Leaves us vulnerable to Fear’s claws

Nikitha Pothireddy
Medical Student
University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine
October 29, 2020

Fever

She can’t stay seated, fake lashes concealing tears.
Her husband is at home due to the pandemic restrictions.
Oh, my baby, she screams, aerosolizing her grief into the room.
The diagnosis slowly bruises her mind like leukemia into her son’s body.
He’s our youngest. He still sleeps with us.
She wishes he had COVID-19 instead.

Benjamin Drum
Resident
University of Utah
October 29, 2020

Flexed to Inpatient

I cut my nails to the quick that night. God forbid my body betray me or my family, virus somewhere I couldn’t scrub clean. The morning: first COVID patient, ICU transfer, her survival a blessing, her gratitude shattering. Remembering my oath, I leaned stethoscope close, listened, touched. Finally—home. Scalding shower. Called kids; dinner alone.

Sarah L. Clever, MD, MS, FACP
Faculty Member
Johns Hopkins School of Medicine
October 29, 2020

Medical School in the COVID era

I wake up at 7:45. I shower while listening to two Teddy-Afro songs. I get dressed. I quickly type in the password to my computer and pull up my zoom. I yawn, sip my instant coffee, and glance over at the picture of me and my mom. I smile and turn on my camera.

Maranatha Genet
Medical Student
Emory University School of Medicine
October 29, 2020

July Intern

We’re a month in, but I still don’t really know any of you. “These people will become your family,” I’m told over and over. To be fair, I haven’t gotten to see my actual family outside of video chats, either, so maybe it’s still true.
The top one-third of your faces seem very kind, though.

Hannah R. Dischinger
Resident
Class of 2021
October 29, 2020

I am ready.
I have passed my exams and performed well in the core clerkships.
I am motivated, young, healthy. Put me to work. I can help. But I am stuck at home. Useless. Quarantined with my knowledge and experience. Mere months from finishing my training. We are an untapped resource and we are ready.

Rachel Fields
Medical Student
Florida International University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine
October 29, 2020

Responsibilities
I have a child, husband, elderly parents, job. Work with colleagues, residents, students, and COVID. Busy days...lots of responsibilities. No more vacations, no more school. Now fear of infection is the reality. Now fear of infecting my family is the reality. Have to stay healthy, optimistic, strong. I am a mother, wife, daughter, and doctor.

Doris Lin
Faculty Member
Baylor College of Medicine
October 29, 2020

COVID19 Musings as Haiku
1. Science non grata
   Lack of trust cuts deeper now How did we get here? 2. Not doing enough Colleagues suffer, I am spared Guilt laced tears fall down 3. Fear of the unknown Waiting, hoping all will clear Calm before the storm 4. Quiet clinic rooms Missing laughter, hugs, and smiles New normal too still

Nicole Kucine
Faculty Member
Weill Cornell Medicine
October 29, 2020

Manifested Worry
Her pupils widen at his radiant coat, And body winces at devices dangling about his throat. Showing demeanor of an impending escape or brawl, I’m sure her perspiration is mostly cortisol. As previous traumas amplify current fears, The only diagnostic tools he can rely upon are his ears.

Rachel Roy
Medical Student
Penn State College of Medicine
October 29, 2020

Coronavirus through the eyes of a 7-year old
How hard it is to stay home. I think about how we are all participating and doing the right thing. I appreciate that lots of peoples lives will be saved in hospitals because of you. Don’t you ever wish that coronavirus wasn’t here and that there were no viruses in the world? Can you imagine that?

Lauren Fine, MD Faculty Member in collaboration with Emma Fine

Nova Southeastern University
October 29, 2020

One Step at a Time in NYC
Unwound, we were and still are unraveling. In many ways, we feel paralyzed in March forever. There’s a fire burning in the distance. What has happened to my city? Try to stare at the screen. Distant sirens ring. Just try to focus. A three digit score can give you the world- what’s left of it.

Zoha Huda
Medical Student
CUNY School of Medicine
October 28, 2020

Connection heals
These days you understand me more than before We long for the loved ones who we’re not able to see We worry for them We look tired in the mornings, wondering all night how next day will be But everyday your warm thoughts melt my plastic costume So happy to see each other again

Dana Giza
Fellow
UT Health Houston
October 28, 2020

ZoomMed: A Place to Meet New Friends?
Zoom. Botched audio, reactions delayed. The way
“genuine” connections start these days. Pre-med, curly hair, Atlanta – the topics of discussion. 1.5 hours, I realized I’d found a good person. A person who’s genuine, kind, and shares quite a few interests of mine. A person whose friendship I could see standing the test of time.

Sydni Williams
Medical Student
Emory School of Medicine
October 28, 2020

Eyewitness to detonation

We were both wearing masks when I evaluated you—a 90-something year-old WWII veteran. You were only 20 serving in an airborne bombing squad. What was it like to be a witness to the first nuclear bomb to detonate in war? You heartrendingly shared that the fallout killed many and this COVID19 pandemic felt similar.

Juliette Perzhinsky, MD, MSc, Faculty Member
Rebecca Hamburger

Sacrifices

I could list each sacrifice made studying medicine on my fingers. Late studying, lesser parties, fewer friends. Now, I watch professionals self-isolate in garages. Others explain quitting. A mentor describes sinophobic experiences. My mother recovers to alleviate her coworkers’ burden. Friends attend morning funerals online, studying at night. Sacrifice is too messy for one finger.

Shubhi Singh
Medical Student
CUNY School of Medicine
October 28, 2020

Here – An Ode to Parenting the “OTHER”

We are the brea (d) th of Evolution, Creation and The Divine. Generations before us, molded this For-Ever-ness of Us. Thriving, excelling, and flourishing. We Breathe. Carving Tomorrows. Creating Flourish. For those who come after Us.

“Here. We are still. Here.”

Adwoa Osei, MD FAAP, Faculty Member
University of California, Riverside
October 28, 2020

The Time for Family

My daughter just turned one. She likes to play pull-the-mask-off-mommy’s-face. We stayed home from March to June, took clerkships online, sat for boards, got a puppy, read a lot of Winnie-the-Pooh and Goodnight Moon. I became essential. I got what I longed for – family, and a course in courage, reflection, and how-to-be-a-Mom.

Laura Jorgenson
Medical Student
University of Illinois College of Medicine at Peoria
October 28, 2020

Distance

Distance from each other... But are we distant from the invisible virus? Fighting a battle with an enemy with a new guise. Will medical knowledge and technology change the course THIS time? In the end, will this new enemy change the way of being... Or maybe through these perils, we will understand our own essence.

Nivedita Thakur, MD
Faculty Member
McGovern Medical School/UT Health
October 28, 2020

Out of One’s Mind

My grandfather calls my father for the third time. He does not remember the previous calls. He’s scared and doesn’t know why he is
in the nursing home, even though this has been his home for the past year. He thinks the staff is keeping something from him. He thinks he may have the virus.

Olivia A Murray
Medical Student
University of Illinois at Chicago
October 28, 2020

ALL THE MEN

... who said she couldn’t: Survive medical school: “you’re not a good test-taker”
Obtain a fellowship: “must have ‘connections’ ”
Direct a program: “young, inexperienced”
Run a board meeting: “you don’t know enough”
...who cheered her on: Holding her son, husband’s hand on her back, her father’s words remembered: “You’re a strong woman”.

Taraneh Soleymani, MD
Faculty Member
Penn State Hershey Medical Center
October 28, 2020

Father and Daughter

It was 1987
It’s 2020
I was a medical student
I’m a medical student
I was in an epicenter
I am in an epicenter
HIV
COVID-19
There was no cure
There is no cure
My people are dying
My people are dying
I am scared for my daughter.
I am hopeful because of my father.

Carrie Crook
Medical Student in collaboration with Dr. Errol Crook
Tulane University School of Medicine
October 28, 2020

Working Remotely....Month 5


Kathleen Nelson
Administrator
Keck School of Medicine of USC
October 28, 2020

The Beauty of a Shared Moment

“The treatment isn’t working anymore” I say.
“That’s quite alright.” she says.
“Would you like to see the chaplain?”
“Later.” A tear runs down her cheek. “Can you pray with me?”
I’ve never been religious, but I sit down, hold her hand, close my eyes and let the peace silence brings wash over us.

Onyebuchi Okeke
Medical Student
Emory University School of Medicine
October 28, 2020

Tissue?

My patient who can’t speak can’t have her husband visit. Her kidney is failing. She started to cry. I couldn’t give her a hug. Between glasses, masks, a shield, I’m part of a faceless team. A tissue passed between gloved hands serves as empathy. Who gets used to this? I don’t know that I can.

Jennifer Ferrante
Medical Student
University of Miami Miller School of Medicine
October 28, 2020

The Advising Dean

I cannot wipe your tears on Zoom or place my hand on your shoulders as you tell me about the death. If I was in...
your presence, I would not be able to come by your side. I can only comfort you with my voice and teach you what I know about life and medicine.

Gauri Agarwal
Administrator
University of Miami Miller School of Medicine
October 28, 2020

Med-student Do not Forget: The Strength of our Physician Formation

Butterfly = Physician
Chrysalis = Formation
It was dark inside, harsh noises outside. Strong winds—a hurricane—stealing my breath away, depriving the light of tomorrow.
It is my time, time to get out. A droplet reflects my wings, Are they broken or are they stronger? I take a jump and soar high; I learn and fight.

Vivian V. Altiery De Jesús, MBE
Medical Student
UPR-SOM
October 28, 2020

Quiet

His wife takes notes with shaky hands. “Kidneys – stable; cancer – progressing.” “I don’t want you to be in intensive care unit again.” I don’t want it either. “Consider hospice?” Six months later, a letter: “We appreciated your patience, your counsel, your gentle manner, the e-messages after hours. “It is too quiet around here without Randy.”

Gurwant Kaur
Faculty Member
Penn State Health Hershey Medical Center
October 28, 2020

Swan

I think she’s Punjabi Rare around here Chatting after the appointment I’ve missed this connection She asks for my name again Last name, too? I give it Faced with her confusion, I repeat myself She doesn’t understand Realize I’m pronouncing it like I’m white, not Indian I correct, try to explain Have I forgotten myself?
Anmol Hans
Medical Student
Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine
October 28, 2020

Outreach to Whom

Hello. Hello, it’s strange. Visits over the phone. Ok. We haven’t talked since it started. The children? Trying their best. I understand. Must be difficult. A lot of changes. Yes. Too many changes. And you? Safe. I hope you are as well. That’s why I’m calling. And my breathing is getting better.

Ann Lee
Faculty Member
University of Alberta
October 27, 2020

For Once

For Once, I take a Moment for our nature. To see stories unspoken Behind smiling eyes. To finally forget The lip’s wasted language and other luxuries. For once I find myself In meditation Observing human harmony Within the realm of discord. For once I take a moment for myself To take in the natural world.

John Newman
Medical Student
Emory University School of Medicine
October 27, 2020

The N95

Words escape in muffled unintelligible sounds with breath that’s puffed and pushed to pluck some meaning from the noise. Then sucking hard to find the oxygen inside the small blue crown that sits upon my lips and stains my cheeks with pain in service to my lungs to stop the silent plague from getting in.

Elizabeth Mitchell
Faculty Member
Boston Medical Center
October 27, 2020

Hero

Called a “Hero” While just doing my job... The career I chose, Before chaos stroke. If I had just been that hero, To make it all stop, Hopelessness wouldn’t have robbed, Who this pandemic longed for. I was no hero after all. I just fulfilled the
vow I vowed: To help others... At what cost?

Rosa Lizeth Frias  
Medical Student  
San Juan Bautista School of Medicine  
October 27, 2020

**Clinic is more confusing**

Unmasked in my office behind a closed door, I still feel safe. Beyond, into the aerosol wedged between us doctoring has become risky. Physical examination is now dangerous. Your masked fears and mine behind a faceshield, attend carefully to your story. What is your illness? Is it the new one? Or one we knew before?

Lara Ronan  
Faculty Member  
Dartmouth Hitchcock  
October 26, 2020

**Rise**

She lies in bed, chest rising and falling. Her breath the sound of sweeping Through glass shards. On her window the patter Of rain overlies a scene of budding Leaves along the Huron. This is how they pass. In isolation. The white gown A forerunner to the shroud. The last breaths turbulent Before ascension.

Natalie Ailene Moreno  
Medical Student  
University of Michigan Medical School  
October 22, 2020

**You Can’t Be Here**

I’m sorry You can’t be by your loved one’s side You can’t be here The virus looms here You can’t give one last touch You can’t give one last kiss You will have to just watch As breath slows, the heart slows Then stops You can’t be here The Virus looms here.

Stephen Paul Wood  
Administrator  
Carney Hospital  
October 22, 2020

**First Step in a Pandemic**

Familiar blue and white screen. Blocks and explanations that stopped connecting one pandemic ago. Inside is turmoil but outside is pure chaos. Do questions or ask questions of the world? Why weren’t we prepared, why are my people dying or, what causes clots to form? Will I get these answers now or after the MD?

Azana Newman  
Medical Student  
CUNY School of Medicine  
October 22, 2020

**Birdsong**

Alone. Days, weeks, months. Intimate familiarity with architecture. Waking up to a repeat sing song, “I’m scared, I’m scared, I’m scared.” Is that bird chirping my anxieties? A world-wide panic attack. We are all alone together. Memories lay down on new moments and time becomes a thing to ponder. Weeks, months, years. Alone?

Chase Crossno  
Faculty Member  
TCU UNTHSC School of Medicine  
October 22, 2020

**Cry**

Death, everywhere. In NY, my home, in the hospital, the world. I cry for the losses: weddings, birthdays, family, life. I cry for the people who choose to doubt instead of support. As if we chose this field not to help but to make political statements. I cry for patients: scared, confused, sick. I cry.

Danielle Cirillo  
Resident  
Rhode Island Hospital  
October 22, 2020

**Chaos and Confusion in a Pandemic**

How does it spread? How can I stay safe? Am I infected? Was I exposed? Will I recover? Stay 6 feet apart. Stay 3 feet apart. Those asymptomatic can’t spread the infection. On second thought, yes, they can. We wait, we experience, we try to learn, but yet, still none of us know the answers.

Rachel Fields  
Medical Student  
Florida International University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine
(October 22, 2020)

**July Attending 2020**

Now with mask and face shield but no patient interactions for five months, are these newly minted third year medical students ready for clerkships? Am I ready? Imprinting: watch me closely but not too closely. Grow and be yourselves. I pray, let the enthusiasm for the profession persist in these young minds and hearts.

*Rebecca R. Pauly, MD*
*Faculty Member*
*Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine*
*October 21, 2020*

**COVID Storm**


*Anonymous*
*Baylor College of Medicine*
*October 21, 2020*

**COVID-Exacerbated**

Purposelessness

*Anonymous*
*Pennsylvania State University*
*October 21, 2020*

**Telehealth**

Poke a hole in the sky, now
On air in mid-air, Words warped by the warp. Vexing window, I should be grateful For such sci-fi conjury. Do what I can with invisible hands. In a viral environ, Reins far-flung up close. On a phlegmatic circuit, We look through the tunnel, The simulacrum of healing.

*Michael Stephen Miller, MD*
*Faculty Member*
*University of Texas Medical Branch*
*October 21, 2020*

**Student doctors and more**

“Only” student doctors, always overseen. Gained confidence from clerkships, no longer green. But – “only” student doctors – and pulled from hospitals. Look back on your journey! We’re not so brittle. PPE donated, contacts traced, patients screened. Though not in the hospital, we have done this and more, After all, we are student doctors And more.

*David Gao*
*Medical Student*
*University of Illinois*
*October 21, 2020*

**It – Is – The Tenderness — In Tough Times**

It is tender hearted – brigade of nurses From upstate – arriving downstate, Bearing their families’ state of mind: Go and serve, We bear your absence here – With your presence there.

*John F. DeCarlo*
*Faculty Member*
*Hofstra University*
*October 21, 2020*

**Where Do We Seek Refuge Now?**

preserves life, instead of destroying it.

Shams Nassir
Medical Student
University of Arizona College of Medicine - Tucson
October 21, 2020

No One Untouched

“You need to come now.” I hang up the phone having just shattered Sam’s life and forty year marriage. He blames himself. If only he’d seen her at the nursing facility he would have known something was wrong sooner. But the virus kept him away. A death not due to COVID, but tainted by it.

Jennifer Caputo-Seidler
Faculty Member
University of South Florida
October 21, 2020

False Advertisement

Never ending war, repression of basic human rights, and scarce quality education pushed my family to leave our home and risk imprisonment and the dangers of human trafficking. The US beckoned with abundant opportunities from across the Atlantic, masking the reality that it will always reduce me to the color of my skin first.

Daniom Tecle
Medical Student
University of Arizona - College of Medicine (Tucson)
October 21, 2020

Virtually Impossible Grief

My intern and I stand with an ipad to facetime the family - too far away, with travel restrictions. The grandmother starts to keen at the sight of her boy. He is too still now, fixed and dilated, only ventilator breaths. “He cannot be that!” broken English, broken hearts, broken composure and we all weep together.

Katherine Mason
Faculty Member
Hasbro Children's Hospital
October 21, 2020

Making Do

Making Do
A duckbill mask filled with the pale blue remnants of what were once elastic straps. Through punched holes, I weave thin strips of Coban and tie ugly little knots. My hair twists mutinously around these new, cumbersome straps. I swear I hear the sickly snap of each breaking strand. I never liked arts and crafts.

Nina Lemieux
Medical Student
Dell Medical School
October 21, 2020

Patient – from Latin for “one who suffers”

Can’t remember his name or surgery. Multiple pages about his irritated eyes. Internal bleeding patient took priority. Hours later I make it to his room. He looked at me through his eye watering. “I’m alright, Doc. I don’t have pain. But if you could give me something for my eye, I sure would appreciate it.”

Mike M Mallah
Resident
Carolinas Medical Center
October 21, 2020

It Happens, Even in a Pandemic

We were two friends starting off our very first rotation. She is white and I am Indian, which made the difference. The questions started immediately. “But where are you from?” “Are you Dr. Ahmed’s daughter?” “Love your tan skin.” Though they were harmless, my friend never got these comments. It happens, even in a pandemic.

Meha Shah
Medical Student
University of Arizona - Tucson
October 21, 2020

Despairing Monotony

For me, the allure of an Infectious Diseases career was twofold: the somewhat
guilty thrill of the differential diagnosis, paired with and mitigated by the fact that cure was typically within grasp. COVID-19 robbed me of these gratifications: diagnostic mystery and the capacity to heal. Practicing during the pandemic has been a dreadful, despairing monotony.

Emily Abdoler
Faculty Member
University of Michigan Medical School
October 21, 2020

A Story Erased

Their dream was medicine, but it was not easy. They failed and tried again multiple times. The feeling that came with their success was immeasurable. All the sleepless nights, the stress, sacrifices, and hard work paid off. Then they hear “its easier for you because of your ethnicity.” Just like that, their story was erased.

Sanga Shir
Medical Student
University of Arizona College of Medicine- Tucson
October 21, 2020

Caught Useless

Seventy-something, Italian immigrant, dementia. In the COVID pandemic, there are no activities, nothing open. He worsens. Me, a soon-to-be medical student, but the lack of an MD degree stings. I cannot help my grandfather, nor dying COVID patients. If I spent a year convincing schools I am qualified, then why do I feel so useless?

Anonymous
Stanford University
October 21, 2020

Providing Comfort

Hair cap, N95, surgical face mask, face shield. My daily armor I smile, but they cannot see. My eyes are all that are available No family, no friends allowed; they are alone and afraid. Compassion and love From my soul, through my touch and my eyes I hope to provide.

Kavita Shah
Faculty Member
Baylor St Lukes Medical Center
October 21, 2020

A Smile is Worth a Thousand Words

Good news is a breath of fresh air A smile long gone, one can finally wear Radiation complete Baby can finally eat Smoking – finally quit Can walk again instead of sit The mask that protects, also hides The greatest emotion we feel inside Joy – a contagion free of harm Hidden now – replaced with alarm.

Maria Shields
Medical Student
University of Louisville School of Medicine
October 21, 2020

Consult & Console

“Tell me about your pain?” The tears fell. I expected the story of the left lower quadrant pain, which had brought her in. “My mother, she broke her hip and she’s all alone.” For a moment, I thought of my list of post-ops, the night already gone. I pulled up a chair, “Tell me more.”

Chidinma S. Tiko-Okoye
Resident
Lankenau Medical Center
October 14, 2020

Pandemic Hero

Her voice crackled on the phone. “Sounds like hero stuff to me.” It was embarrassing to explain that all I really do is assemble PPE and study in my room; sidelined while real doctors risk themselves on COVID wards. Medical students rarely feel useful, but now we’re reminded of it every day on the news.

Jacob Hartman-Kenzler
Medical Student
Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine
October 14, 2020

The Wave on My Run

I ran along the dusty road, To escape the loneliness and pain untold. Toward the old woman sitting on the porch I plodded, She became my beacon given what life had allotted. A stranger she remains in every sense except one, Everyday
without knowing it she saves me, with a simple wave on my run.

Anonymous  
Warwick Medical School  
October 14, 2020

Orientation “Zoom”-ing By

In silence, scrolling through “gallery view” to make friends. In person meetings create a 10-person community but it’s more than spotty online connections can do. “This ain’t college” and it certainly doesn’t feel like it. The upcoming unknown feels overwhelming but I am reassured that I’m not the only one who feels this way.

Sarah Gold  
Medical Student  
Emory University School of Medicine  
October 14, 2020

Withdrawal of Accreditation

Close the program. Voluntary? Hardly. Inevitable. Yes. Told residents. Told faculty. We mourned. Saved the best for last said residents. End of an era said faculty. We planned a celebration. COVID-19. Black Lives Matter. We shifted attention to more important issues. Turned off the lights and closed the door. Silent goodbye. No we. Only me.

Lisa Gilmer  
Faculty Member  
University of Kansas School of Medicine  
October 14, 2020

Our Reflections

The fall and rise, breathing holds no lies I see you suffer, you think you are tougher This disease is new to us, you have lost your trust I want you to believe in our guidance and care, can we meet there? If you refuse, you perish, your loved ones you will fail to cherish.

Anitha Chandran  
Resident  
Florida Atlantic University  
October 14, 2020

There Was A Day

There was a day when life felt warm; serene and calm, Perhaps foretold of an approaching storm, Then there is today, like a shadowy squall, As life dissipated into a helpless yowl, But there is always tomorrow, unseen but felt Of hope and love, far but near, Like a story of history and time itself.

Hamza Ali Lodhi  
Fellow  
Florida Atlantic University  
October 14, 2020

The wrong patient

Chart review: 82 y/o female with multiple cancer relapses and a poor prognosis. “I married my high school love sixty years back. We travelled, raised kids and are blessed with great-grandkids. I have had a wonderful life.” She started treatment before I was even born. I wondered if I was with the wrong patient.

Roshan Chudal  
Resident  
Louis A. Faillace, MD, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at McGovern Medical School  
October 14, 2020

Post-COVID Clinic

“So you’re who I have to blame for my hoarseness?” said my former ICU patient. “But you were REALLY really sick…” In that moment, you understood: your eyes filled with tears and gratitude, as did mine, and we were two doctors both crying over Zoom as we stared at each other, thankful to be alive.

Lekshmi Santhosh  
Faculty Member  
University of California-San Francisco  
October 14, 2020
Adapting

Our family moved cross-country to start medical school. All day I learn science and humanities so that I won’t lose my humanity when my future patients need it most. My wife, pregnant, nauseated, isolated from old friends by distance and from new friends by COVID-19, somehow cares for our son without me. No regrets. Grateful.

Zachary Jensen
Medical Student
Penn State College of Medicine
October 12, 2020

Love in the time of Corona

Love in the time of Corona
The wedding was canceled. A package came from my mom—two masks, one white with lace, one black with a bowtie. We asked our Medicine program director to marry us on the nearby bridge. We walked down the street, our families in our pockets, our dog replacing the bridal party. It was wonderful.

Sarah Rhoads
Resident
Brown
October 12, 2020

Body Language

Back at the hospital, finally. It has been months. Everything is different. I no longer see mouths or facial expressions due to masks—only eyes. I struggle to connect with my patients and colleagues. No encouraging smiles. No handshakes. No intimate gestures of comfort. I feel inept when stripped of using body language in medicine.

Rachel Fields
Medical Student
Florida International
University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine
October 12, 2020

A Wandering Smile

My smile wanders, searching for a way past my polypropylene mask to you from my eyes to your eyes through a plane of plastic from my hand to your hand through a layer of latex buzzing by my vocal cords to reach your empty ears in small words floating through the filtered air between us.

Vishesh Jain
Resident
Santa Clara Valley Medical Center

Mental Health


Peter Vollbrecht
Faculty Member
Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine
October 12, 2020

Pressing Pause

Commitment to heal and serve others, in their most vulnerable moments of life. We earnestly swore. Years of studies, hoping knowledge would save. Mastering the art of physical exam. Healing through touch. Yet faced with pandemic, we are discouraged to touch. Sent home. Knowledge paused. Unable to heal. The irony: student doctors shielded from disease.

Hanna Knauss
Medical Student
University of Toledo College of Medicine and Life Sciences
October 9, 2020
Sacrifice

Anonymous
University of Texas Dell Medical School October 9, 2020

Masked connections
Connections with patients form the foundation of trust. That connection used to evolve from a smile or gentle touch. Now, I smile at patients, forgetting that the smile is hidden behind my mask. I look into their eyes and see their fears and hopes. We continue on and make new connections through all the uncertainty.

Eleny Romanos-Sirakis
Faculty Member
Staten Island University Hospital Northwell Health October 9, 2020

Together Apart
Our eyes now smile for our mouths that have lost the privilege. They pierce through the tension engendered by collective fear to remind us that we are still human, and that we still have the propensity to love one another. Our eyes protect us by bringing us together, while keeping us apart.

Mika Mintz
Medical Student
University of Miami Miller School of Medicine
October 9, 2020

Gratefulness
Gratefulness
Our crisis wears on and life still creates challenges. New and old to all I know what I’ve kept I see what others have lost. Hardships, they abound. You are on my mind. My heart goes out to you all who give in these times. Thank you for everything you do.

Fatima Chagani
Medical Student
University of Miami Miller School of Medicine
October 9, 2020

Safe breathing spaces
We are hunkered down afraid to breathe. Looking for hope. Within this long night. We lost a lot. Fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, husbands, wives. Alas children too. Let us fight for rights. Of those vulnerable. Let us equalize the breath. Give a gift of safe breathing space. For colors of the heart are the same.

Manveen Saluja, MD
Faculty Member
Aetna -CVS, Wayne State University and Oakland University school of Medicine
October 9, 2020

Misfortune Rising

Evelyn Darden
Medical Student
Penn State College of Medicine
October 9, 2020
**Video visit**

I tell her she has a rare cancer. My voice is shaky. She laughs. She says, “Why me? Why not me?” We laugh together. She doesn’t cry. I would have cried with her if she did. I couldn’t have handed her a tissue if she did. It’s a video visit. I can’t hold her hands.

Zehra Tosur  
Faculty Member  
Baylor College of Medicine  
October 9, 2020

**Optics, plastics, and haptic**

Filtered breath escapes between my mask and nose, fogging shield, yet I clearly see your worried brow. Cloth and plastic muffle voices, disguise faces, lips cannot hide smiling eyes. I would grasp your warm hands with my inevitably cold ones, tactile sensate Gloved must do haptics muted by clammy nitrile cannot dull a healing touch.

Lealani Mae Acosta,  
MD, MPH  
Faculty Member  
Vanderbilt University Medical Center  
October 9, 2020

**Regret**

Social distancing kept me from noticing how sick you had become. Our 15 year routine of Sunday dinner, became limited to FaceTime and grocery drop-offs, where you toughened up so that I wouldn’t be concerned. Now, as you reach your final days, I think that maybe you should have been my bubble buddy.

Annie Wood  
Administrator  
OHSU Family Medicine  
October 9, 2020

**Visiting**

Ms. J cried, then apologized for crying. After surgery, I worried about her. It was mid-March. I didn’t know what was safe. But she was afraid, so I visited her. She told me, “It’s too much.” I listened. I kept my distance. I worried about the breath that carried my words. Still, this felt essential.

Sharada Narayan  
Medical Student  
UC Berkeley-UCSF Joint Medical Program  
October 9, 2020

**Vermont Spring**

A Vermont lake cabin reserved for childhood weekends suddenly became our home for three months. My fiancée and I arrived in early March, early enough to watch the spring ice melt.

Andrew Catomeris  
Medical Student  
Georgetown University School of Medicine  
October 6, 2020

**A hand to hold**

Ever since COVID, my patients have been scared and alone. No measure of facetime will suffice in exchange for physical presence of family and friends at bedside. That’s why it’s ever more important these days for us doctors to offer a kind word of encouragement and a hand to hold.

Julian Swanson  
Faculty Member  
Baylor College of Medicine  
September 8, 2020
Finding Color in the Darkness

Finding Color in the Darkness
Knitting has always been my companion; in COVID, we grew closer. She brought purpose to my hands when touch was no longer an option. She made me feel useful as the world crumbled and roused parts of my brain through creativity. Together, we discovered what could be as yarn unraveled and color returned from darkness.

Judith Brenner
Administrator
Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell
September 4, 2020

Moving Pieces
His days are long at sixty, As they have always been. His eyes closed briefly between cases When the adrenaline fades. His cough is better now. My time is still consumed by Books and flashcards and Mock patient encounters, But I’m coming, Dad. I’ll be there soon.

Winston Whiting Oliver
Medical Student
SUNY Upstate Medical University
September 4, 2020

Heal
Emotions have been everywhere. Students care and want to see patients. Residents want to experience the pandemic up front. We must let them. We must support them. We must protect them. We must keep ourselves whole. We must let patients see our hearts and imagine our faces. We must breathe. We must teach. We must heal.

Regina Macatangay, MD
Faculty Member
University of Maryland School of Medicine
September 4, 2020

Into the Unknown
She’d only let her phone ring once before she excitedly answered. “Hi, honey! How’s work?” “We had our first COVID patient today.” She sat down, silently. “It’s bad.” He paused. “Don’t…come home tonight. Just stay at your mom’s for now.” “Until when?” “Until it’s over.” “But when is that?” “…I don’t know.” He whispered.

Estelle Vu
Medical Student
Penn State College of Medicine
September 4, 2020

My Bias
Black, purple sweatpants and sneakers, and scruffy beard, in the ER. His phone rings, “that’s my song” he asserts. Eyes roll, yeah right. “I need to be discharged to receive my Grammy” he proclaims. Eyes roll, yeah right. My bias, almost missed conversing with a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee and Grammy winner.

Douglas Ander
Faculty Member
Emory University
September 4, 2020

The gift of touch, through PPE
Sick teen, dialysis. Went to tell her mother: ‘no changes’. She told me the loss of an infant prepared her for this child’s diagnosis, and another daughter’s. Four months ‘cancer-free’ before relapse. Grateful for ‘the talk’… “it was OK to die”. I listened, thanked her. Through PPE, I touched her shoulder: “see you tomorrow”. Tears.

Don Batisky, MD
Faculty Member
Emory University School of Medicine
September 1, 2020

Shumard Oaks
Breaking through societal imposed expectations, statistics, and reignited resentment. Proceeding through a heightened awareness of what Mr.Roth would refer to as The Human Stain. I rebuke self-imposed limitations. My mind is durable, my will is tenacious, and my humanity will serve all the same.

Vanessa Vides
Medical Student
Penn State College of Medicine
September 1, 2020

A Double Toxic Kiss
Days after both feeling sick. “You might want to get

Tiffany Rebecca Sánchez
Medical Student
San Juan Bautista School of Medicine
September 1, 2020

Local epidemiology, not in the news?

Cars arrive on the block, parking closer than 6 feet. Visitors carry toddlers, glass containers for potluck next door. BBQ smokes, tempting aromas aerosolize. As people cross the exposed lawn, I see smiles, not masks. My phone pings again, irritating. Alerts for each new positive SARS-CoV-2. They keep coming. My neighbors do not hear.

Kathleen Julian, MD
Faculty Member
Penn State Hershey Medical Center
September 1, 2020

A Good-bye

Your wan face appears on my screen. Disappears. A voice I don’t know says something I can’t make out. You re-appear. You are small amongst white sheets and blue tubes. Silent amongst beeps and alarms. Still amongst calamity. The heat of your skin after gardening on a sun-scorched day or making love- a distant memory.

Nan Barbas
Faculty Member
Michigan Medicine and University of Michigan Medical School
September 1, 2020

What lay ahead

Social distancing isolated him, and left him time to think, A window into what might wait for him after retirement. To avoid his future, his pain, led him to drink, And so he came to us. We removed his shroud. He stepped from our hands to the care of others. We stood together, fighting despair.

Philip Brown
Medical Student
University of Texas Southwestern
September 1, 2020

Patient Care

“There’s no heartbeat”, she says. Not again. Numbly trudge back to work to face another day. First patient: “Been praying for you every day. You pregnant yet?” I burst into tears. Very professional. An ample, yet firm, gentle, yet strict grandmother of 11, she gives me the only comfort I’ll feel today. A mother’s hug.

Eliana Hempel

Faculty Member
Penn State Health
September 1, 2020

Quite the med school ride

Med school, such an incredibly hard endeavor for it’s subjects. Imagine starting your first semester just to have a hurricane blow by in September and wreck your island. Couple of years later get a 6.4 magnitude earthquake followed by the COVID-19 a couple of months later. WE WILL PREVAIL!

Jaime A. Roman
Medical Student
Ponce Health Sciences University
August 31, 2020

Quarantine Stitches

Quarantine breeds stress Anxiety builds Thoughts race, water runs, dishes soak, the cassoulet breaks Blood between thumb and index finger pools Stitches needed Left arm raised high Call the PCP, stay calm They’ll see me Thankful for community-based-care, my kind DO Asked what I needed, listened and validated all the feelings.

Ali Smolinski
Administrator
Penn State College of Medicine
August 31, 2020

Retrospection

Falling leaves approaching dusk and old photographs make me cry. Unshed tears
the limited time pills large and small constrict my throat. Precious moments fugues in time halcyon days swim before my eyes. The touch of your hands hope in your eyes the smile on your face are all I need to go on.

Ananya Das
Research Proposal Specialist
Penn State Health, Milton S. Hershey Medical Center
August 31, 2020

“Everything will be ok” is not the answer to everything

“Why dad doesn’t wanna wear a mask? I told him to! He doesn’t care!” — says the boy, while pulling the beanie down to his nose, drying his tears. “Does he wanna die of COVID and not be with me?” My first Tuesday’s Children at the Psychiatric Clinic. I was wearing a colorful ribbon as requested.

Angélica Nieves-Rivera
Medical Student
Ponce Health Sciences University
August 28, 2020

Clerkship Interrupted

My lifeless whitecoat hangs on the door, Safe to say it’s needed no more. TikTok, Netflix, and long walks, Sometimes it’s nice when the TV just talks. Sitting and waiting for the pandemic to be done, I wonder if the virus has already won.

Max Trojano
Medical Student

Penn State College of Medicine
August 27, 2020

The Quake and the Virus

A year earlier, no one would have believed you; that Puerto Rico would live through two major earthquakes and a pandemic in the span of 5 months. Yet, here we are. The psychological and financial impact of the earthquakes was worsened by the pandemic. Nevertheless, we as medical students continue to prepare for tomorrow.

Ramon Misha David
Medical Student
Ponce Health Sciences University
August 26, 2020

When Being Safe Doesn’t Mean Being Free

Often felt helpless as a doctor. Hopeless, too. Par for the course. Unrestrained virus isn’t affecting me, though. Watching friends and family on the front lines, exposed, vulnerable. This is devastating me. The guilt feels quite heavy. Should I seek out ways to help? Or do I indulge in the lack of personal risk?

Gabriel Sarah, MD
Faculty Member
University of California, San Francisco
August 26, 2020

Protected

I examine my patients, masks slung under noses. A toddler sneezes on me. I change my scrubs. My blue paper mask is a week old. My patient’s father has an N95. He sleeps in it alone in their private room. Every visitor masked properly. I catch myself staring enviously, maybe angrily. Then, I am ashamed.

Heather Edward
Resident
The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University/Hasbro Children’s Hospital
August 26, 2020

The Transformation

A once bustling unit transformed. All patients were moved. Short-lived quiet set in, Broken by the construction crew, Adding monitors, exhaust fans to the windows. Would this be another COVID ICU? Overnight every bed would be occupied. This process repeated day after day, Spreading throughout the hospital like a virus. Tears flowed. Back to work.

Steven J. Sperber, MD
Faculty Member
Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine and Hackensack University Medical Center
August 9, 2020

She is a nurse too

Gloved hand caresses her head, grey-white hair soaked with sweat She looks at me,
fearful, breathing strained A mask shields my worry My face should not be the last she would see She slips into sleep Intubated Hang fluids, give pressors, change the vent Google's fogging, I'm now sweat-drenched She is a nurse too

Stephen Paul Wood  
Administrator  
Carney Hospital  
August 9, 2020

Sickle No More

She presented with another Sickle Cell Crisis, day before her 22nd birthday. My first patient as an intern. Bilateral leg ulcers visible to the eye. Tulips delivered from her twin brother the night before. Intravenous fluids, Dilaudid, and Oxygen. Morning rounds, code called. Compressions performed, unsuccessful. Beautiful peacefulness in her eyes, flowers at her bedside.

Stephen Henderson  
Faculty Member  
Penn State Health-Hershey Medical Center  
August 9, 2020

Blank Stare

Eyes wide open unable to look away from the world furiously unraveling. We began this journey to help, now we sit still, idling. Incapable of offering our untried hands; we grieve the loss of opportunity. When again will we look into a patient's eyes? Until then, we stare blankly at the computer screen, our pedagogue.

Sole Soul

For my patient, I act as their loved one. Standing vigil outside a glass door, holding their hand in my gloved palms, watching over them behind goggles and mask. For loved ones, I am the sole soul standing between their family member and the dark cloak of Death who paces the halls watching in turn.

Sara Journeay  
Resident  
Tufts Medical Center  
August 9, 2020

Solitary confinement

Donning PPE, my gloved hand on his shoulder, “Sir, you have coronavirus.” He didn’t move. His foot handcuffed to bedrail. His dad died last week from the virus. Didn’t see him. Didn’t make the funeral. “Doc, my cellie kept coughing. No way to keep us 6 feet apart. No masks. No cleaning supplies.” Solitary confinement.

Priti Dangayach  
Faculty Member  
Baylor College of Medicine  
August 9, 2020

Unexpected Goodbye

It came out of nowhere when you left; It was theft. Your time was short but your legacy long, We will celebrate your life in dance and song. I can’t say I’ve struggled like you; But I can say I’ve been low too. Your pain was unique; But peace, we all seek.

Onyebuchi Okeke  
Medical Student  
Emory University School of Medicine  
August 9, 2020

Untitled


Mikaela Katz  
Resident  
University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center  
August 9, 2020
The Storm

Like an encroaching storm, COVID-19 gains momentum. An ominous sky foreshadows masked isolation and death. Discontented winds sweep the land. The burden of racial injustice saturates the dark clouds, erupting in pelting rain, each drop stinging wherever it lands. Hailstones of racial violence add destruction to the deluge. Will a rainbow follow this national maelstrom?

Michael P. Flanagan, MD
Faculty Member
Penn State College of Medicine
August 9, 2020

Like Stars

Like stars we shine and burn
Like a noble army of white coats in eternal defense of the earth from the moon. Armed with any number of antidotes To save all but ourselves. For we are not immune. Like stars we shine and burn And burn out.

Matt Tsai
Medical Student
Larner College of Medicine at UVM
August 9, 2020

A chink in someone’s armor

Once she sees my raven hair and “exotic” features, will she ask me to go, ok? As I flip another intubated COVID patient prone to ease his breathing, I study his brown and yellow life lines. Will I be a chink and someone’s armed, or Will I be identified for who I am? A doctor.

Lealani Mae Acosta, MD, MPH
Faculty Member
Vanderbilt University Medical Center
August 9, 2020

Fractured

They say, “It’s not a great time to enter medicine”. They say, “This country is fractured beyond repair”. “So America is like a skeleton”? “Then who’s better to repair, than those in healthcare”? We might be scared of what’s to come. But we will work til’ we’ve gone numb.

Lauren Pomerantz
Medical Student
Penn State College of Medicine- University Park
August 9, 2020

COVID Goodbyes

COVID Goodbyes
The nurses in the CCU used to make their calls at 4 a.m.: “Come in at once.” Loved ones would hurry in just in time to hold a hand. But now the spouses, lying all alone at home, listen to the dreaded midnight message on the telephone, then try, but fail, to fall asleep again.

Lauren Pomerantz
Medical Student
Penn State College of Medicine
August 9, 2020
The New Screen Time

The New Screen Time
After years of resisting distraction by computer screens during office visits, my patients have ironically become one. Where touch and gestures are limited, the pace and tone of our voices, tools unfettered by telemedicine, become essential. Simply reassuring patients that we are here for them despite not being there in person goes a long way.

Jillian Pecoriello in collaboration with Dr. Jeffrey Millstein
Medical Student
New York University School of Medicine
August 9, 2020

Your Body Speaks

You can no longer recite your hopes and aspirations, but I’ve held the brain that formatted them. You can no longer communicate your hardships of life, but I’ve retraced all the scars etched in your skin. You can no longer tell me, but your body speaks for you. What a beautiful life you lived.

Jessica Pirkle
Medical Student

University of Illinois College of Medicine
August 9, 2020

Unprecedented times of Uncertainty

Another invisible war to fight. Headline news – “in these unprecedented times of uncertainty.” I am confused, what are we referring to, COVID-19 or how I’ve felt my whole life as a black man in America? Pause, breathe, think. Maybe knowing is not important because something is different this time. Ironically, I don’t feel alone.

Anonymous
Medical Student
Upstate Medical University
August 9, 2020

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Anonymous
Medical Student
Upstate Medical University
August 9, 2020

#13

Francisco J. Lopez-Font
Medical Student
San Juan Bautista School of Medicine
August 9, 2020

Becoming a Physician During the Pandemic

=I choke down coffee in the parking lot. Once the mask is on, it’s on. Under blaring E.D. lights, I quake. I am your doctor. Mask, goggles, face-shield: PPE protects patients from my fear. Taking the Hippocratic Oath, I had imagined my future fear: Will I hurt you? But now, also: Will you hurt me?

Hanna M. Saltzman
Resident
University of Utah, Department of Pediatrics
August 9, 2020

Stamford

We pray before dawn
Preparing our walk along the Rippowam
Protect us, protect our child,
give us strength
Holding coffee and hands
We turn quietly up Broad
Protect us, protect our child, give us peace We kiss before masking
I follow her tired eyes and growing womb
Protect her, protect our child, help us all

Ethan McGann
Medical Student
Eastern Virginia Medical School
August 9, 2020

Destiny or Obscurity: Life of a Health care Professional during the pandemic...

I am not scared of death, but the uncertainties of life
Everyday i go to bed with my faith to wake up alive
Sometimes worried about the fall, yet I am standing tall!
“Hippocratic Oath”
Guys! All troubles seems small Let’s embrace the uncertainties with responsibility
To defeat the virus, racism, stigma & inhumanity...

Jarina Begum, MD
Faculty Member
Great Eastern Medical School and Hospital, Srikakulam, AP, India
August 9, 2020

Did my grandmother send her?

Two girls were born on the same day thousands of miles apart. They grew up speaking Spanish. Thirty years later, CoVID and pregnancy would bring them to meet across an ICU window. Over shared prayers and a rosary;

a crying baby at home with his mom. It’s our birthday this week.

Diana Robles
Fellow
University of California - San Francisco
August 9, 2020
intubation; delivery; finally –