



Reflections on Starting Residency in the Middle of a Global Pandemic

I never imagined I would start my residency in the middle of a global pandemic. That I would be worried about PPE availability. Or be afraid of contracting a new virus that scientists were racing to find more information on, a virus that could potentially have life threatening consequences. That I wouldn't see my family for more than a year. That I would spend my free time outside of work isolated and away from others so that I wouldn't bring COVID-19 into the hospital and to my sick patients.

It would sometimes feel like some members of society had no regard for what was going on inside the hospital walls. That there existed those who refused to accept scientific knowledge. Those who spread false claims that COVID-19 was a hoax or that doctors were making up the virus to earn more money. That there were people who would refuse to wear masks, social distance, or limit travel.

There was a time when we couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. When we felt weighed down by over-the-maximum hospital censuses, the increasing number of colleagues who were sick or in quarantine, and the number of cases exploding nationally due to lack of containment. When we didn't know if a vaccine against COVID-19 could even be developed or if it would be effective or safe.

I remember an undergraduate mentor once told me that being a physician is a calling. That I should pursue another field if I just wanted to earn money or take an easy road.

I understood better what it meant to be a physician when I started residency. When I saw the courage, resilience, and perseverance that my attendings, fellows, and residents carried despite facing already three months of hardship and uncertainty. When despite what was going on in the world and our nation stricken by racial inequality, the strongly polarizing bipartisan election, the continuing hardship of the low and middle income class – they marched on. They led by example, continuing to see their patients and to lead the team despite the chaos and the unknown risks and harms of COVID-19. Despite the raging storms surrounding our nation and our world, physicians remained steady, helping to be the eye of the storm. In these troubling times, to have a steadfast, constant guide to navigate through difficulties of life is invaluable. To have medical knowledge be translated into choices that can be understood, to have words of support or closure in the end. To be a physician is to take charge and responsibility in unprecedented times, to provide hope and assurance that we will get through this together.

With the vaccination roll out, we have been given hope in the fight against COVID-19. Now, many of us have received the second and last vaccine in the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine series, and we can feel the air lightening. With the new federal administration and its ambitious plans for mass vaccination, I am hopeful of the days to come. We will get through this – together. We can and we will defeat this virus.

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