



Illustration by Steve Derrick

From student to teacher: The transformation of medical students during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Following months of unprecedented spread, the global outbreak of COVID-19 was declared to be a pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020.¹ As physicians, residents, and fellows were

needed to fight the novel coronavirus, the role of the medical student underwent a transformation. In what will be the seminal moment of their medical education, medical students were faced to make a decision: stand idly by or face the threat of a new virus. While medical schools were left wondering how to best make use of their students, medical students were taking the initiative to redefine their own roles. Much like 100 years ago during the pandemic of 1918, when they staffed hospitals and distributed protective masks, medical students have shown great courage in fighting this new pandemic.²

Across the nation, students are working alongside their professors and physicians, administering tests and screening patients. Upperclassmen volunteer to teach first- and second-year medical students, amid calls for early graduation of fourth-year students in regions hit hardest by the virus.

Medical students have become pivotal in the efforts to study the novel coronavirus and report their findings to the public and medical community. As their physician mentors are overburdened with clinical responsibilities, it has fallen to medical students to write reports of the pathophysiology, prevention, and treatments of COVID-19.

Whether publishing peer-reviewed articles or informing the public through Internet campaigns, word of mouth, and instant messaging, medical students have become instrumental in the efforts to fight the novel coronavirus pandemic through the spread of vital information. Medical students are virtually connecting with others nationwide as they conduct research from their homes, inboxes ping-ponging with the latest edits from their colleagues in different time zones.

As medical students take on new roles in the fight against COVID-19, what is certain is that the train of science moves ever-onward, stopping for no one, and is pushed by those who are courageous in the face of uncertainty.

References

1. World Health Organization. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report 51 [PDF File]. 2020. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>.
2. Ott M, Shaw SE, Danila RN, Lynfield R. Lessons learned from the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. *Public Health Rep.* 2007; 122(6): 803-10.

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In Memoriam

Nino Carnavale (AΩA, Albert Einstein College of Medicine Montefiore Medical Center, 1988) passed away October 3, 2020.

Shirley E. Dearborn (AΩA, Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, 1975) passed away May 4, 2020.

Neil Johnson Elgee (AΩA, University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry, 1950) passed away March 20, 2020.

Michael T. Flannery (AΩA, University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine, 1987) passed away December 5, 2020.

Thomas M. Fletcher (AΩA, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, College of Medicine, 1963) passed away September 16, 2020.

Caleb González (AΩA, University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine, 1957) passed away January 10, 2021.

Stephen Irwin Goodman (AΩA, McGill University Faculty of Medicine, 1962) passed away October 30, 2020.

Ted L. Grayson (AΩA, Indiana University School of Medicine, 1953) passed away December 2, 2020.

William R. Hiatt (AΩA, University of Colorado School of Medicine, 1976) passed away December 8, 2020.

Joseph P. Johns (AΩA, University of Colorado School of Medicine, 1979) passed away September 1, 2020.

Albert Jonsen (AΩA, Honorary, 2009) passed away October 21, 2020.

Philip R. Lee (AΩA, Stanford University School of Medicine, 1949) passed away October 27, 2020.

George A. Lentz (AΩA, University of Maryland School of Medicine, 1956) passed away December 12, 2020.

Jason E. McClellan (AΩA, University of Virginia School of Medicine, 1951) passed away February 10, 2020.

Charles Elford McKay (AΩA, Wake Forest School of Medicine, 1977) passed away August 29, 2020.

Russell J. Nauta (AΩA, Georgetown University School of Medicine, 1988, Alumnus) passed away June 12, 2020.

Frederick B. Parker, Jr. (AΩA, SUNY Upstate Medical University College of Medicine, 1988) passed away December 5, 2020.

Austin V. Puglisi (AΩA, SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University, 1992) passed away November 23, 2020.

James B. Rhodes (AΩA, University of Kansas School of Medicine, 1968) passed away April 16, 2020.

Mark Jeffrey Rumbak (AΩA, University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine, 2014, Faculty) passed away November 25, 2020.

Ronald R. Scobbo (AΩA, West Virginia University School of Medicine, 1970) passed away November 14, 2020.

Clifford Smythe (AΩA, University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine, 1952) passed away September 29, 2020.

Dora Stinson (AΩA, University of Western Ontario Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, 1961) passed away July 25, 2020.

Jim Willerson (AΩA, Baylor College of Medicine, 1964) passed away September 16, 2020.