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Reflection on Clinic and COVID-19

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Abstract

This is a reflection of an M2's clinical experience with the unexpected effects of COVID. It takes you from the emotions of the first face-to-face clinical experience through the separation thrust upon all to the revelation of a new way to practice medicine. The reflection reminds the reader that the reason medical students work so vehemently is to make a difference in the lives of others.

Reflection

I was so excited when I went to my first KNIGHTS clinic. My desire to have a career in medicine has always been fueled by wanting to help people feel their best so that they can live the best life possible. With my first hands-on clinical experience, I was a bit timid, a little insecure, and apprehensive. I took a deep breath and stepped into the room and shook hands with my first real patient. Leaving the clinic that evening, I felt encouraged and excited about my future in medicine, even though I had only participated in taking vitals and recording notes for the attending. There is just something about contributing to a person's health, at any level, that is so rewarding. I was fortunate enough to attend a handful of clinics before life was halted by COVID-19. I felt like the rug had been yanked out from under me and I was placed on hold. Not only would I not be able to help people while we were quarantined, but selfishly, I would not be able to continue my growth of clinical experiences. So much energy and knowledge comes from working with patients. Clinic helps to keep me focused and reminds me of why I spend so many hours and days seeing nothing but medical textbooks. Clinic is also an experience that cannot be

duplicated in a simulated world. I felt a huge loss to patients and practitioners that had been inflicted by COVID-19. As time progressed, students continued to be kept separated from patients.

Still, as we approached Thanksgiving, as an M2, I was not able to work with patients with physical face-to-face interactions at the clinic. Fortunately, after a few months of quarantine, we were allowed to begin virtual appointments with patients. I was excited for the opportunity to work with patients again, to help them, and to learn from them. My first face-to-face virtual meeting began as a Zoom meeting. I was able to connect with the gentleman, gather information, and help provide him with a plan. However, I felt a bit cheated. I immensely missed having a genuine meeting that included shaking his hand, personally obtaining vitals, and performing a total body observation of my patient. That being said, this visit was not all about me. It was about the patient. I had to remember that COVID-19 had also kept him from getting the care he had expected. He, too, had been placed on hold. He had been looking for someone to help him with his medical concerns. Even though the clinic visit was not a traditional interaction, he was so grateful to be receiving help. He appreciated the fact that I was there for him. He was not concerned that there was a screen and many miles of physical space separating us. He cared that he had someone willing to help him. His gratitude reminded me of the purpose of clinics. That specific clinic visit was exactly what I needed, too.

I was grateful to be reminded that even though the visit was not to my expectations, it was successful. It reinforced the reason I do this, to help people feel that they are getting help and moving towards the best life they can have. I realize virtual medicine is the current form of practice and has a definite place in our future.

I see the future of medicine to not only continue with virtual visits but to also expand and improve the use of virtual visits. Patients are already receiving monitoring devices from their primary care providers to help track blood pressure, heart rate, and oxygen levels. Even though virtual medicine lacks the opportunity for physical touch and comfort, I appreciate that confined patients now have quicker and easier access to health care, that patients can have acute ailments addressed without exposing themselves and others to contagious illnesses, and that people experiencing pain can wait for their appointment in the comfort of their own home.

There are pros and cons to everything in life, and I may not have had the opportunity to experience virtual medicine this early in my medical career if it had not been thrust upon all of us. As I continue caring for people, I will continue to view each experience as a way to grow, learn, and expand my horizons. I will remember that no matter what, the reason I work so hard is for the betterment of others.
