

dear residents

Upheaval, Transition and Renewal

January 30, 2022

Dear Residents,

I am looking back at these last two years since Dr. Wang took the reins from Dr. Johnson on Feb 1, 2020. It could not have been a tougher beginning. The pandemic commenced shortly afterwards and swung wildly for two years. Life did not seem linear at all. There were upswings and downswings. We zoomed in, we zoomed out. We convened in groups, we dispersed. In March 2020, we were near certain that all would be over by Summer 2020 – we didn't even imagine that we would have to cancel the graduation party. But it all changed and continued to change. In winter 2020, we were convinced that this would be the last remote interview season, only to realize that it wasn't. It has rained upheaval for 2 whole years. We were firmly ensconced in a cycle of unpredictability. Yet, we continued our work, we adapted, and the results are stunningly encouraging – you are competent, you are confident, you are growing, you are learning, and you are still on track. This itself is truly remarkable. Along the way we also learned a few things.

Self-care emerged as critically important

We connected to ourselves, we discovered what was truly important. Our true core was revealed to us. We Netflixed, we baked, we read, we cooked, we took walks, we worked and learned remotely - feeling remote yet enveloped by our own unfiltered self. Our bedrooms, our kitchens, our sofas and our coffee tables were our new workspaces. We quietened and heard our inner voice. We took stock of what we truly valued.

Connecting with loved ones felt especially urgent

As vacations, planned weddings and the simple act of going over to see someone all evaporated, we found ways of staying in touch, of expressing our deep social bonds – recognizing how profoundly interdependent we are.

Acknowledging emotions became essential

Panic, despair, sadness, anger, disbelief, grudging acceptance – a range of uncomfortable emotions rose to the surface. We voiced these, we embraced these, we normalized these. We are very human after all. All around us there were startling narratives – that COVID was a ruse, that people were dying of underlying conditions, that vaccines were dangerous, that masks were unnecessary – science was under attack and by extension we were in the crosshairs.

The nature and intensity of our work changed

Even as you spent some time working remotely, essential inpatient work became taxing, urgent, and inefficient. The knowledge of how to take care of COVID exploded as did the need to take precautions. It was simultaneously exciting and draining. Critical care numbers pushed you to new limits of endurance and fatigue. Communicating with family added hours to your daily work – hours you did not have. There were innumerable scheduling changes. This was dislocating. And we weren't immune to the illness ourselves – especially to the Omicron variant.

Deep resilience emerged

That you survived and thrived and ducked and leaned through all of this was possible because you adapted, innovated, and persisted. Our institutions also displayed resilience and fortitude. Dr. Wang led from the front, becoming the nexus of information and planning. Chief residents moved swiftly. Dr. Johnson kept us sane. Committees were stood up, communication accelerated, COVID units were created, clinical trials commenced, and everyone pulled together. This is not to suggest that no cost was borne – it was – research labs closed, revenues dropped, and patients suffered. In your own words “COVID destroyed my residency.” It certainly took a lot away, but we protected most of it.

The sense of world community became apparent

SARS-CoV-2 was rapidly sequenced. The scientists of the world freely shared their work. Therapeutics, tests and vaccines were developed at remarkable speed. The pain of the pandemic spared no one, and the interdependence of our world became apparent as supply chain woes rippled through our shared ecosphere. That the pandemic became politicized was regrettable. Inequities were laid bare as some parts of the world had many more resources than others, and within communities, the most vulnerable became even more so. Misinformation reared its ugly head and like the Hydra, it became impossible to defeat. And sadly, some members of our own profession became misinformation superspreaders.

When the pandemic ends, we will undergo a period of transition. There will be a long goodbye to what has been a sense of pervasive permanence – we will be getting unused to masks, to zoom, and to the need to avoid personal touch. There will be a messy middle – like cleaning up a closet – what's ready to give away, what still fits, what needs to be acquired. I look forward to a period of renewal, a new beginning. I personally resolve to pick up where I left off – spend time with you, visit friends, family, places and roam a bit more freely with less trepidation.

The vision of the residency remains the same – to provide you the best possible experience in the best possible learning environment. A program thrives when it reads the environment and adapts accordingly. In 2012, we began a long rebalancing process, carving out clinics, then subspecialty experiences, enriching the value of elective time, adding global health opportunities, creating research pathways, and enhancing mentorship. This journey is ongoing and largely directed by what is best for you.

I also expect your wellbeing to improve. After a low in the 3rd week of January, this last week was already better!

	Responses	1	2	3	4	5	Avg:
Jan 1-7	124	0.00%	1.61%	23.39%	40.32%	33.87%	4.07
Jan 8-14	116	0.86%	3.45%	18.97%	41.38%	35.34%	4.07
Jan 15-21	104	0.00%	4.81%	20.19%	41.35%	33.65%	4.04
Jan 22-28	60	0.00%	3.33%	20.00%	36.67%	40.00%	4.13

Some of you started before the pandemic began, some after it did. I am confident that all of you will experience a return to the way it was or the way it is supposed to be before your training is over.



The Wolf Moon rises over Mow Cop Folly, in the village of Mow Cop, England, on January 17, 2022 - Carl Recine/Reuters

Warm regards,

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