



April 17, 2020

COVID-19 Letter to SMH From an SMH Parent and Front-lines Doctor

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Jonathan,

My wife and I have been working so much that your email tonight came as a shock. I have hundreds of messages that I have not been able to address as my focus has been on my group, my patients, and the emergency departments we serve.

The hospitals are in financial crisis due to low volumes, canceled surgeries, and absence of any elective procedures. However, my wife in the Peds ICU and me in the ED have never been busier.

I have been required to drastically reduced provider hours to keep our group afloat financially and in the process, I have furloughed two fifths of my physicians without pay.

Most have savings, but I was shocked that a fair number have large medical school loans and debt obligations that they can not meet. They are struggling.

Meanwhile, the skeleton crew of providers I have retained are working harder than ever. They have to be almost twice as productive to produce the revenue necessary to ensure we meet a minimum reduced payroll.

I am not sure when things will improve. It is a grim situation to have capable providers who can not assist because we are unable to pay them yet the patients we are seeing are more ill than I have ever encountered.

It is a great relief to know that SMH has fully engaged with the distance learning program. Without it, my kids would likely play video games and watch movies all day because Mom and Dad are often absent for long periods focused on trying to hold the ship together.

I am more impressed with SMH than I have ever been because the faculty are still pushing my kids and pushing their limits despite all the roadblocks COVID-19 has produced. (Karpman's lectures are awesome, and I try to make them whenever home...my son thinks it's funny.)

While I am sad regarding the inability to carry on the traditional ceremonies of graduation and other special events, I remind my children that the key to survival from the cellular level to the largest living organism is successful adaptability to rapid change.

My children are getting an education right now that they will never forget. They are learning a lesson in resilience that you can not teach. By watching the instructors struggle to pass on important concepts, by struggling with their homework alone, by watching Mom and Dad struggle to keep it together while work is trying to tear it all apart, they are witnessing courage; they are learning resilience; and they are developing the willingness to adapt to change rapidly that will keep them alive later in life.



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It is important to grieve the loss of the school year. It is sad to not be able to participate in traditions that bring us joy.

But, a part of me wants to celebrate this incredible opportunity that will likely never occur again in our lifetime. After all, we participate in traditions and ceremonies to mark a point in time that we can all remember.

The whole world is marking this time as we struggle and adapt together. A true reminder of how fragile it all really is.

In 2003, in my last year of residency, on a cold and snowy NY night, I had a 94 year old patient roll in on an EMS gurney. She was short of breath and had pneumonia in the midst of flu season. Between rapid breaths and before she was taken to the ICU, she spoke of the flu of 1918. She told me, "That flu in 1918 didn't get me. I was 9 you see. Some of my friends died. My uncle died. And, Momma, well, she almost died. When I got sick, I told myself that all I had to do was keep breathing. It worked, and I made it." I smiled at her and listened closely. She was frail and weak, but her blue eyes were clear. There was little I could do. The body is so fragile at 94 that aggressively treating her could make her worse. So, I listened. That is when she smiled and said, " Looks like old Mr. flu finally is gonna get me, but it's ok. I made the most of every day since I seen him last."

The end of the school year won't be the same, but in some ways, it will be better.

We will miss you and your family Jonathan,