



Pandemic Virtuosity

Close yet so far

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Submitted: 21-MAY-2020

Accepted: 22-MAY-2020

Published: 26-MAY-2020

The domino effect of going, going, gone...

The unraveling of my intricate travel schedule of medical education presentations due to intrusion of COVID-19. Trying to wrap my head around postponements at best, cancellations more likely including an international visiting professorship. My story but one aspect of significant disruption in medical education as physical distancing took effect. Disappointing, yes, but then fading into obscurity within the context of so many healthcare professionals and staff taking their places on the frontlines and within the extent of global suffering. For me, the loss of a physician friend to COVID-19 made it very real. It hurt my heart. He was just doing his job.

The personal and professional collide. Don't they always? But, maybe more evident at such challenging times. Worry about family, worry about colleagues...I've got two physician daughters in NY, a son who's a dentist, yes, on my mind. And seeing pets and hearing babies crying during Zoom meetings, listening to students' concerns about their peers' and family members' health, personal and professional issues coming through in students' reflective writings...

There's terrifying fluidity of boundaries with this COVID-19 that apparently doesn't care very much about whether you're wearing a white coat or not - it got that patient on the ventilator and you very well may be next. With "zoomed out" medical students, I tried to bring positive energy and reflective space for a pause, for an opportunity to connect and share before the structured session content. Several students expressed appreciation for this and for a poem of hope I sent prior to the session. Just because.

COVID-19 is an amplifier in so many ways, of tough stuff in healthcare and in our society that we've played ostrich with. That is hard to reckon with. For me, it has also amplified grief and loneliness associated with the recent loss of my neurologist husband to glioblastoma. Now physically distanced from family, I've made a conscious effort to use time productively (busy is good) with some self-compassion tossed in when it's just one of those days. And trying to minimize social distancing with virtual connection through Facetime, Zoom, Skype, and phone, sharing streamed musical concerts and virtual art museum tours with family and Twitter friends, sharing my poetry...

Cite this article as: Wald HS. Close yet so far. RHIME. 2020;7:118-9.

My son's in marketing and working from home in a sardine apartment. He called to tell me to head outside to my driveway because a delivery had arrived. It was him in a rented car after a 4 hour drive, masked and gloved with a mask in his hand for me, a cheer-me-up that left me speechless and thankful for good kids. It hurt not to hug but we do what we have to do. Physically distanced, we took a walk and then we sat on some faded Adirondack chairs that used to be a green hue. The ones that always are set next to each other in photos, symbolizing gazing in serenity at the sunset together, wine in hand, the ahhh of relaxation,

and the joy of sharing life's treasures together. Not this time. The breeze carried our words but not the COVID because we were sufficiently distanced and more so. After a couple of hours, I packed him up with some food and some for his sister as well and back he went with chicken and brisket and homemade vegetable soup and more, my expressions of love. Both of us grateful for the moment and for being loved.

After he left, I was struck by the positioning of the chairs, now empty, now barren and yet... with the forsythia in bloom behind them, the promise of spring.

