

Kristen: How COVID-19 has Redefined Learning from the Perspective of a Nursing Student.

The last moment of somewhat normalcy I remember from March 2020 was sitting in the hallway of my freshman dormitory talking with the other residents of my floor. We were painting a mural on the wall to represent the year we spent as floormates that was tradition to our dorm. While people came and went to check on our progress, one of my floormates began speculating about the e-mail we had recently received extending our Spring Break by two weeks due to the surmounting COVID-19 cases in the state of New Jersey. He was certain that we would not be back after our break, and many others including myself were overly optimistic that we would. It now seems silly that I, as a nursing major taking a microbiology class in the same semester tracking the progress of SARS-COV-2 each class, thought it possible for a virus to run its course in two weeks and go back in hiding.

Those two weeks lasted eight months, full of studying in my room and hearing my mom throughout the day on conference calls as she began to work from home in our living room. Learning online was not so bad when we first went remote, but in the Fall, I started my more hands-on and involved nursing courses. Back in April when New Jersey was hit with the first wave of hospitals at max-occupancy and peak cases, my friend's mom who worked in the brain trauma recovery unit in a hospital close in town fell ill with COVID-19 after he brain trauma recovery unit was shifted to cater to the outbreak. As she was overcome with the virus, she had suffered many signs of ailment I was not even aware of could occur, such as partial paralysis and prolonged loss of taste even after testing negative weeks later.

Seeing a glimpse of what my potential future in my friend's mom has put into perspective how many sacrifices it takes to be a nurse. Whereas my parents have become increasingly worried for when I enter my clinical practice from such an anecdote, my skepticism lies in

knowing how to decipher the hyperactive and normoactive bowel sounds, and which questions to ask in which order when collecting a patient's health history. Nonetheless it's become increasingly difficult to learn how to practice adequate nursing skills when you have to squint at a screen while practicing nurses are facing bed shortages and sleeping in their basements to prevent spreading the coronavirus to their family. Rather than practicing on our simulation patients in the lab, we are frantically searching through YouTube trying to deduct normal heart sounds from murmurs and struggling to determine if a virtual patient has a skin lesion or if it's attributed to the program's graphics.

However, these are sacrifices we must make to preserve the health of the general public, and our own health so that we can reach the education to guide and lead others in circumstances like these. Although our public health circumstances may not be recovering as we would like, as I engage in the beginning of my career as a nurse, I'm also beginning my lifelong career as a learner. I look forward to looking after those in my eventual clinical care, even if there are hiccups along the way.