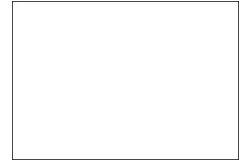




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Postgraduate Inpatient Training in the time COVID

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Late February is always an exciting time for me as the Co-Director of the inpatient medicine Advanced Practice Fellowship (APF) at the University of Colorado Hospital. Six nurse practitioners and physician assistants were getting ready for their first day as fellows on March 1. Our leadership team was putting the final touches on our month-long boot camp while badges were printed and white coats were embroidered. Then on February 26, the first case of COVID-19 without a clear exposure was diagnosed in the United States; community spread was here, and the world within the hospital seemed to geologically shift overnight.

As program director for nearly 8 years, I admit to possessing an overly paternalistic approach to “my” fellows. Our more than 60 graduates feel like family. It is privilege to watch them grow from intelligent but timid graduates into confident and competent clinicians. My first inclination was to figure out how to move this new cohort to remote learning and bring them back to the hospital once things had “quieted down.” Ah, how naïve I was a month ago.

What I have come to realize is that the same compassion, curiosity and ambition that drove me to attend medical school 20 years ago drives these young, hard-working fellows to complete a voluntary postgraduate fellowship. When the March cohort and more advanced cohorts were asked whether they would see COVID-19 positive patients, all fifteen fellows answered in the affirmative. Trying to shield these learners from the pandemic on the surface felt like the right thing to do. But really this shielding would simply undercut their identities at a most critical moment in history and in their development.

Instead, we are hustling through the orientation of these new fellows so that when our faculty become quarantined they will possess the knowledge, skills and attitudes to step into these roles with confidence. Some of our senior fellows required “battlefield promotions” to take on faculty responsibilities. But while I am spending much more time talking about personal protective equipment than how to read electrocardiograms, we strive to conduct educational business as usual. The amazing resilience, bravery and commitment of these fellows bolsters my faith that we will weather this formidable storm.

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