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In Sickness and in Health in South Texas: Narratives of COVID's Impact

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### COVID and the Path to Optometry

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Journal Entry #4: Compassionate Healthcare

When I first heard of the COVID-19 virus, I suspected that it would be just like the other viruses I had encountered throughout my life. I thought that the idea that one virus would shut the world down was inconceivable. However, in March of 2020 I was proved to be mistaken. Although the COVID-19 virus had many impacts on my life, the most life altering was that on my occupational wellness.

Before the start of the shut down, I was a full time undergraduate student aspiring to become a physician's assistant. As a requirement for admission to PA school, I needed to accumulate a certain amount of patient care hours. However, with a full class schedule occupying the majority of my week days, it was difficult to find a sustainable healthcare job that could accommodate my schedule and fulfill these requirements. During the shutdown, I found myself with time during the day and an opportunity to become an optometric technician presented itself. With class now asynchronous with no specific meeting times, I was able to work during the days as a technician. This was a life-altering experience for me because it was during my job as an optometric technician that I fell in love with the eyes and decided to pursue optometry. Without the shutdown caused by COVID, it is less likely that I would have been able to take advantage of this opportunity and find the fulfillment that optometry has brought to me.

During COVID, I was very fortunate that my family and I stayed healthy and no income was lost due to both of my parents having essential jobs. However, I know this was not the case for everyone, and many people struggled during COVID more than ever before. I know this because of the interactions I had with my patients during my time as an optometric technician through the course of the pandemic. I was able to hear many different experiences on how the pandemic was affecting other people in ways that I had not been affected. This helped me realize that everyone was facing different challenges during the pandemic, and it allowed me to have a wider perspective and more compassion for what others were going through. Without this exposure, I would have had a hard time understanding why other people viewed the pandemic as they did.

I now feel like I can take this knowledge of how a certain situation can affect people in many different ways and apply that to my future career as an optometrist. As a healthcare provider, it is essential to remember that every patient will have a different story and it is important to be compassionate and mindful of those differences during every interaction. Regarding my occupational health, I believe that COVID gave me the opportunity to expand my knowledge of how to approach each person as an individual with a unique life story and provide them with the best care possible.