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

11-19-2022

The Pandemic and It's Impacts

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Recommended Citation

Garcia, Olivia, "The Pandemic and It's Impacts" (2022). *In Sickness and in Health in South Texas: Narratives of COVID's Impact*. 10.

https://athenaeum.uiw.edu/sickness_health_narratives/10

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Olivia Garcia

Compassionate Healthcare

The Covid-19 pandemic had a strong impact on me in many ways. It began when I was on spring break of my senior year of undergrad. It was very strange to have my last two semesters be so different than what I was used to. I went back home since all of my classes were online, which was nice because I was able to spend so much time with my parents and grandfather. But it was such a time of uncertainty. Watching the news and seeing so many people getting sick, so many people dying, and so many others being selfish and not protecting the people around them. I saw the wealth gap in the country get even larger. And although I luckily didn't lose anyone close to me in relationship, I did lose many people who were close to me in proximity, as I come from a small town of less than 5,000 people. It was such a hard time for so many, and my mental health was greatly affected.

Graduating college into a pandemic was odd. By December 2020 I felt incredibly isolated, and had no idea what my next step would be. I knew I wanted to go to optometry school, but it felt impossible. My brain felt like it didn't know how to learn anymore and my motivation was gone. I applied far too late for the cycle, and I didn't have any optometric experience, partly because of my depression and isolating myself but also because of the pandemic and wanting to keep me and my family safe. I didn't have the strongest feeling that I would get accepted because of the poor mental state I was in, but it was still a discouraging feeling when I got the news. But I finally got some help, and was doing better. I finally reached out to a doctor to shadow, and I was able to get a job at the office as well. I moved to San Antonio to shadow and work, and was able to move in with family. The support was much needed. It was still a great challenge to go into work, knowing how bad the pandemic was here in San Antonio. I feel as though the isolation that most people were going through caused so many to be less compassionate and kind. I had a coworker that made feel absolutely terrible about myself, and therefore my mental health was that much worse. Going into a place where I felt belittled and taken for granted, in a pandemic when so many were getting killed, being away from my elderly grandfather who I was previously helping with his day to day activities before I moved; it was very tough for me. I am very happy to say that I got through it. But I can only imagine how hard it was for so many others. So many aspects of life were negatively affected for everyone. We've lost so many.

I feel as though the pandemic opened my eyes to many types of suffering. Which is hard to deal with but I believe it will make me a better doctor, as I can empathize with every patient and think about what they may have/may be going through. I think at the end of the day we are all just trying our best with what we have.