

COVID - 19 is here to stay!

There are new workflows, new ways of getting into the office, temperature checks, COVID tests, people getting sick, and dying every day. I have been in medicine since 1976 when I first entered the doors of Lady Hardinge Medical College to get my MBBS degree, but never have I seen anything like this virus and the illness it causes in men and women. In India becoming a physician meant that patients gave you their undying loyalty, and generations of the same family became patients of mine even as a young resident. It is a very special relationship when the grandmother, mother, daughter and all the men in the family trust you with their family's health. Leaving India, I thought I had left the multi-generational patient-physician relationships behind. But, arriving in Baltimore in 1986 and becoming a Family Physician resurrected my relationships with mostly women patients who started slowly to bring me their spouses, children, parents, neighbors, and friends. I have probably delivered my share of hundreds of lovely healthy babies in the Baltimore community and cared for some children until they grew to be old enough to become mothers themselves. As the years went by, I developed a panel of 2300 patients I knew by name, I knew their mothers, their children, their spouses, and boyfriends. I became privy to the most sensitive of secrets, cried with my patients when they grieved, and laughed with them during happy times. Most of all I considered it my duty to keep my patients healthy, living life to their fullest, supporting patients through the dips and highs that inevitably accompany patients through their lives. During my 26 years at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, I have also had the incredible privilege to train a couple of generations of medical students and residents. I have also basked in the reflected glory of multiple high achiever students and residents.

In 2009 when I was diagnosed with cancer, I moved to the newly established Immediate Care for our practice and became a strong pillar in this new practice. Then came COVID-19! Graduate students from across campus were being restricted in their movements as never before! Overseas travelers were being quarantined and given limited guidance on the specifics of COVID-19! We were not allowed to see patients like before. The University of Maryland Occupational Medicine asked me to work off-campus.

Thus, I decided to utilize telemedicine to communicate with my patients and support them through the COVID-19 pandemic. The telemedicine paradigm is very interesting! For the first time in my long career, I was calling patients through video technology, and 'meeting patients in their home surroundings! It gave me an insight into how the patient was functioning within their home at the time of our conversation. These interactions were robust-most patients were thrilled to be checked upon and delighted to tell me how they were accommodating the new restrictions. Some would 'walk' me around their house and share little tidbits of family news and explain in detail how they were following my advice. Yes, I had my share of sad individuals, those who had a hard time adjusting to the new normal, those who had

lost their jobs, lost loved ones; but for the most part telemedicine interactions are uplifting and the engagement with patients is priceless. Patients are happy to find their doctor still cares for them, that they still have a health care home for their needs.