

I Signed Up for This

Kayla Morrell

Medical Student, Sidney Kimmel Medical College; DIMER/Branch Campus Student

I signed up for this. My cousin Noah, who has spent the first (and only) 3 months of his life in the hospital, did not. As first-time parents, my uncle and aunt have been faced with a nightmare they couldn't have even imagined. Not only was Noah born six weeks prematurely, he decided the best time to grace us with his presence was in the middle of a global pandemic. He spent some time in the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) and when he finally graduated, his furry big brothers were thrilled by this new squirmy present their parents brought home, even if he made loud noises and smelled funny sometimes.

Then, Noah started having difficulty breathing. Their pediatrician recommended they take him straight to the Emergency Room, but once there, they were greeted by disbelief that a pediatrician would send someone in such an at-risk demographic to the ER in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were sent home. Unfortunately, he got worse and by the time they got back to the ER, he had to be intubated. To make matters worse, only one parent was allowed to be with him at a time. They were scared. Seemingly overnight, they, along with the rest of the world, were thrust into a COVID-19 stricken place, with public health terms scattered about and everyone thinking they know best.

I signed up for this. They did not. I was able to talk to them (socially-distanced, of course) daily, calming their nerves and offering simple explanations behind the terminology the physicians were using. If I didn't know it, I looked it up. In a time where medical students can't directly help on the front lines, but signed up to help their community, this was an opportunity for me to help those closest to me. And it paid off to see everyone's relief when Noah was finally home again, although I think the puppies were happier than anyone.

Though I might just be finishing up my first year of medical school, I knew that there would be times where I would be risking my own health for the wellbeing of my patients. I can't say that I expected myself and my peers to be put in the face of a global pandemic this early in our careers; however, I joined the medical field to help my community. It is inspiring to see the way medical professionals before me are banding together to help save the world.

I hope to encourage those younger than me in the same way. In a new elementary health curriculum I am creating with Nemours, we did a lesson about COVID-19 on the very last day before schools were closed. The students played *Virus Tag* to show how easily infection can spread and did an experiment to show how soap helps protect you from germs. To say they loved it would be an understatement.

I signed up to help my community in any way possible, even if I'm not yet on the frontlines saving lives. Not only am I inspired by the healthcare professionals paving the way ahead of me, but also by those who are following in my footsteps, albeit they have quite a few years of school to go. But one day when it's time for Noah to start medical school, I'll show this to him and say, "Kid, you were literally born for this."

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.