



Saturday Morning Zooms: The Distancing That Brought Us Together

"Welcome to the meeting!" I woke up to this early morning announcement as I logged in to my first Zoom meeting with my cardiology co-fellows. What a huge surge of unpleasant feelings I felt that morning as our program director announced the new measures we would be taking as a training program during the COVID-19 pandemic. "We are reducing the number of fellows in-house in order to minimize potential viral exposure, and you will continue to take turns on the essential services in order for you to meet your training requirements and avoid any delay in achieving your training milestones" our PD announced. Several other new measures were discussed during that meeting with the hope of protecting us from exposure to the virus while minimizing its impact on our education.

By the end, it was clear that this was not our regular monthly meeting but rather the ushering in of a new era. I still had to figure out the reason for the unpleasant feeling that remained at the end of that meeting. Was it the apprehension of being in a hospital in the midst of a pandemic, the fear for my life or the lives of my loved ones, or the need to adapt to the unrelenting itch from that new mask on my face and newfound obsession with hand sanitizer?

Maybe it was the fact that I was in the group assigned to stay home, worrying about the negative implications on my training and experiencing guilt that I was not on the front line during that time. Perhaps, it was the toll of being forced to pass time in the solitude of social isolation.

Weeks have passed, but I have yet to get to the bottom of that feeling. Nevertheless, I quickly realized within a few days that I was far from seeing the whole picture.

As I looked around me, I found a group of people with "all hands on deck" from the hospital and home alike, preparing new workflows and protocols to confront the virus and distilling the deluge of information for our entire department to assist in managing our own patients.

Immediately, we started volunteering for back-up coverage when one of us needed to be home for personal or family reasons. We transformed our fellowship room into “The Bunker,” our favorite new sanctuary in the hospital where we stored hand sanitizer and masks, completed e-consults to avoid unnecessary exposure on the wards, and supported each other from six feet away.

However, the change was not limited to the typical workweek. Saturday mornings were not the same anymore as well. At 8:00 am every Saturday, all fellows and program leadership gathered in a Zoom meeting, yes another Zoom meeting! But this time we were not talking about how our patients were doing but instead how WE were doing. Yes WE! A word that WE often tend to ignore as doctors. A meeting where we talked about how we were spending our weeks, how our families were doing, what new recipes we tried to cook at home, what creative ideas worked best to pass the time during the quarantine, and of course whose birthdays were being celebrated that week with an occasional Zoom musical rendition.

Yes! The challenge in COVID-19 for us fellows (and similarly for all physicians) has once again highlighted an essential need to not only take care of others but also of each other!

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Kinan Kassir, MD is a second year general cardiology fellow at Allegheny General Hospital who has been elected to serve as chief fellow next year before starting an interventional cardiology fellowship.

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1554 Paoli Pike, Suite 298, West Chester, PA 19380
877-793-8171

pcacc.org