1 **Title:** COVID-19: Using Social Media to Promote Mental Health in Medical School During the Pandemic

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3 **Author names:** Han G. Ngo[1], Brianna L. Gibney[1], Paul Patel[1], Jennifer L. Nguyen[1]

4 **Degrees:** B.S.

5 **Affiliations:** Oakland University William Beaumont (OUWB) School of Medicine

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7 **About the author:** Han G. Ngo, Brianna L. Gibney, Paul Patel, and Jennifer L. Nguyen are second-year medical

8 students at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine, Rochester Hills, Michigan, USA of a 4-

9 year M.D. program. We are part of the Asian Pacific American Medical Student Association (APAMSA).

10

16 **Compliance with ethical standards:** Any aspect of the work covered in this manuscript has been conducted

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18

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20 Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision, Project Administration: HN, BG, PP, JN.

21

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25 **Personal, Professional, and Institutional Social Network accounts.**

26 - **Facebook:** https://www.facebook.com/apamsaouwb/

27   https://www.facebook.com/OUWB.SchoolOfMedicine/

28   https://www.facebook.com/han.ngo.9

29   https://www.facebook.com/brianna.gibney

30   https://www.facebook.com/paul.patel.5815

31   https://www.facebook.com/jennifer.nguyen.56

32

33 - **Twitter:** @OUWB, @APAMSA, @Han_Ngoo, @BriannaGibney, @Paull_Patell, @JJ_nguyenn

34

35 **Discussion Points:**

36   1. APAMSA at OUWB leads COVID-19 mental health awareness campaign

37   2. Breaking the stigma associated with mental health for the medical school community during COVID-19

38   3. Using social media to promote mental health in medical school during the pandemic

39   4. Creating a long-lasting tradition of mental health promotion for the medical school community

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1   **Publisher's Disclosure:** *This is a PDF file of an unedited manuscript that has been accepted for publication.*

2   *As a service to our readers and authors we are providing this early version of the manuscript. The manuscript*

3   *will undergo copyediting, typesetting, and review of the resulting proof before it is published in its final citable*

4   *form. Please note that during the production process errors may be discovered which could affect the content,*

5   *and all legal disclaimers that apply to the journal pertain.*

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1 **THE EXPERIENCE.**

2 The Asian Pacific American Medical Student Association (APAMSA) is a national student organization that

3 advocates for the health of the Asian American Pacific Islanders. One of APAMSA's long-standing traditions

4 has been the mental health initiative, in which local chapters are encouraged to take action to promote mental

5 health and wellness for their members and communities.[1]

6

7 In May this year, our APAMSA chapter at Oakland University William Beaumont (OUWB) School of Medicine

8 hosted a mental health campaign titled "Socially Distant but Emotionally Connected: 6ft Closer During

9 Quarantine" (**Figure 1**). Given the coronavirus pandemic and social isolation, we selected our existing

10 APAMSA Facebook page as the platform to host our campaign. The campaign lasted two weeks and featured

11 both written responses and video responses from medical students and faculty who wanted to share how they

12 were coping with the pandemic. The goal was to create a space for everyone at OUWB to engage in

13 meaningful conversations about mental health and support each other during this trying time.

14

15 From the mental health campaign, we soon discovered medical students and faculty members had a myriad

16 of thoughts and tips to share with their fellow peers. One student said, "nothing can quite replace the

17 connection that is felt by the proximity of another person" when remarking on the — at the time — novel

18 quarantine rules. We had gotten accustomed to being around each other at school that we were flustered

19 when isolation initially began. It was especially daunting for some students who were far away from their

20 friends and family. However, the student also suggested that this was a perfect opportunity to reconnect with

21 people one may have not heard from for a long time, saying, "I have enjoyed reviving old conversations and

22 initiating new ones" and " it makes for great storytelling when months and years worth of accrued experiences

23 are showcased in a spontaneous call." One of the faculty members provided a visceral account of his

24 experience during the pandemic saying, "I would describe myself as often agitated, worried, depressed …

25 numerous adjectives melded into a single troubled state." He shared familial and work circumstances that had

26 made the pandemic quite vexing for him. For us students, this was a tangible and genuine way to understand

27 just how widespread the effects of the pandemic were as an esteemed faculty member struggled in the same

28 ways we did. Nevertheless, he had warm words to support the students by saying, "While I have always said

29 'my door is always open to you,' that means little nowadays. Perhaps it's better to say 'I'm only an email or a

30 phone call away.' I have always been, and will always be, here for you."

31

32 Numerous other medical students and faculty members shared their feelings about xenophobia, loneliness,

33 and lack of motivation during the pandemic, but also added helpful tips on how to adapt to a new normal.

34 Though the pandemic came with its share of difficulties and problems, we were reminded again how close of a

35 family our community is and that we will always be there for each other during these difficult times.

36

37 Over the course of our two-week campaign, each post was able to reach an average of 220 followers and had

38 an average of 84 engagements according to Facebook analytics. Although our campaign could have reached

39 more people through broadening our social media platforms to Instagram and Twitter, we considered it a

40 success in the following ways. Firstly, by including the voices of faculty and students, our campaign was the

41 first of its kind at our medical school to bring members of the community together to discuss mental health.

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1   This was evident when several medical students voluntarily reached out and asked to share their stories on
2   our platform. Secondly, we included a daily mental health challenge component as a way to motivate students
3   and faculty to engage with each other in a way that otherwise would not have been possible during social
4   isolation. For example, some of the challenges included trying a new recipe and reconnecting with a faculty
5   member (**Figure 2**). Many students sent in photos from our daily challenges and we featured them on our
6   Facebook page. Through our initiative, the emotional support within our OUWB community was able to
7   penetrate the barriers of social distancing.
8
9   Overall, the meaningful connection created by our campaign made it more than a worthwhile endeavor. Social
10 networking sites such as Facebook make information more accessible, help reduce stigma about certain
11 health conditions, and provide social support for the general public.[2] In addition to the aforementioned
12 benefits, an online health campaign can be held at no extra financial cost to the organization. We urge that
13 other medical schools implement their own mental health awareness campaigns to destigmatize the topic in
14 their communities. The following steps can be used to get started:

15   1. Identify an interest group that advocates for mental health to start planning the campaign. Collaborate
16   with other interest groups by asking them to promote posts on social media.
17   2. Narrow down the focus of the campaign by deciding on the participants and the subject matter. Will it
18   be limited to medical students? Will it be subjects related to preclinical education or clinical rotations?
19   3. Make a list of questions that you would like the participants to address.
20   4. Collect responses and decide which social media platform(s) to post on. Lastly, share with your
21   community (**Figure 3**).
22
23 Mental health is a pertinent topic that is often overlooked in the medical school community. The theme of our
24 campaign was #stay6ftclosertoyourfeelings during the pandemic, but we hope that regardless of the times, a
25 long-lasting tradition of mental health promotion for medical students will be created.
26

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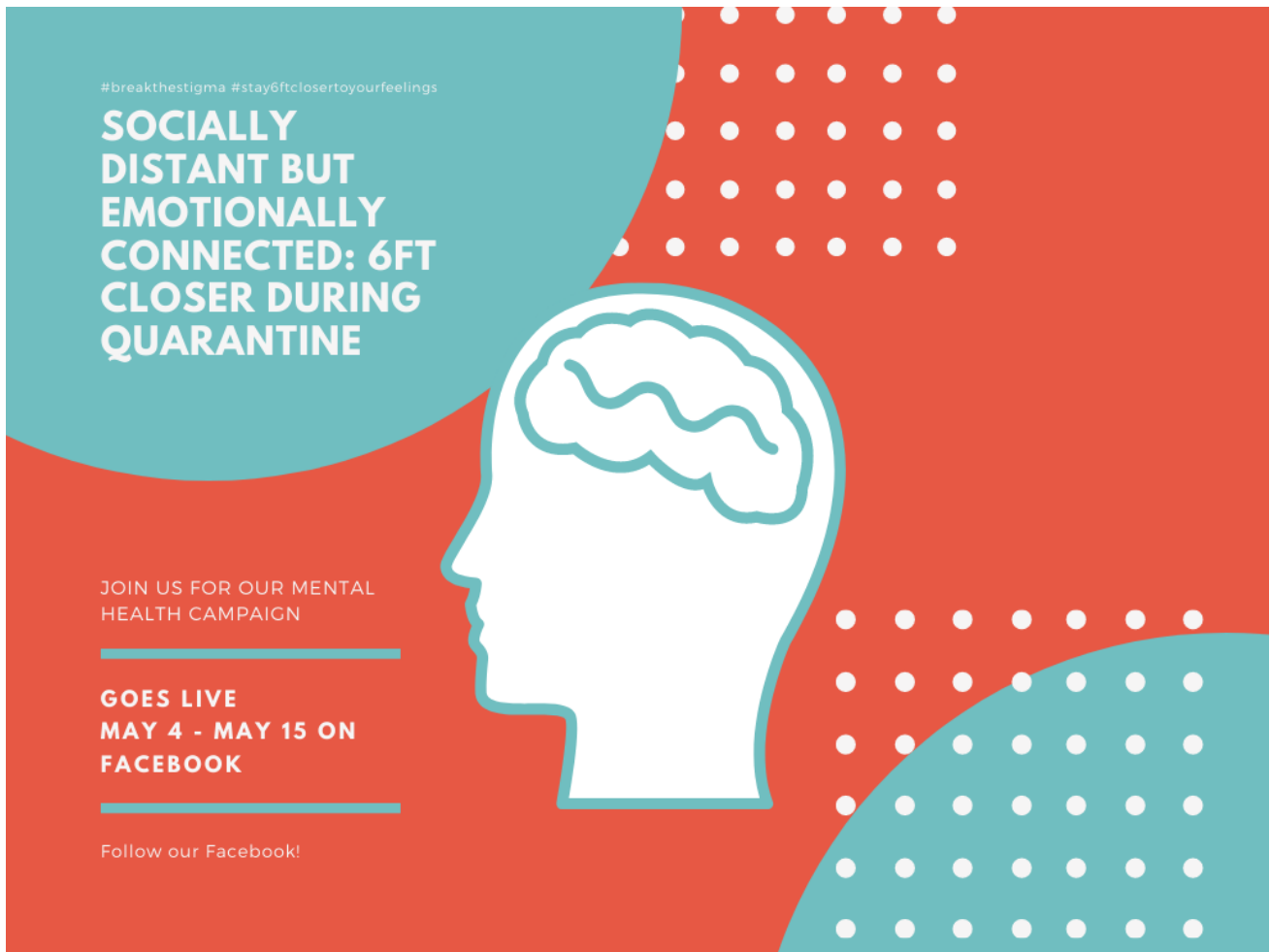
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1 **FIGURES AND TABLES.**

2 **Figure 1.** OUWB APAMSA's Mental Health Initiative Campaign Poster in May, 2020

3

4 **Legend:** Poster made by Jennifer L. Nguyen.

5

1   **Figure 2.** Photo Submissions from OUWB Students During the Daily Wellness Challenge

2

3   **Legend:** One of the daily wellness challenges was to try a new recipe.

4

1   **Figure 3.** Social Media Campaign Template for Each Participant's Post

Name of participant

Photo and Pull Quote

#stay6ftclosertoyourfeelings

2
3   **Legend**: Sample template for a virtual campaign including the participant's name, photo, quote, and campaign's
4   hashtag.