

COVID-19: Not a Positive Test Result, but a Positive Outlook

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The Experience

The year 2020 has been nothing short of terrible, leaving society in a state of quandary successfully putting a foothold for many years to come. Indeed, it is no secret that the world has been anticipating the end of a treacherous year. As the year 2021 commences, collectively, we have welcomed this New Year with higher hopes and optimism like never before.¹ The series of events that occurred in 2020 — a nerve-racking Presidential election in the United States and intense wildfires in Australia, to name a few, while egregious on their own accord, seemingly appear minute compared to the worst of all: COVID-19.² The RNA virus that stood out amongst its own kind led to a worldwide shut down leaving millions without work.³ Despite what seems like a scene from the movie *Contagion*, 2020 was not without silver linings. You just have to look for it.

“Now more than ever we need your talent, your energy, your resolve and your character,” said Dr. Fauci to new medical graduates at the height of the pandemic.⁴ Dr. Fauci’s words encapsulated a nation-wide push for more physicians and healthcare workers to assist on the frontlines as we battled a truly unprecedented virus. As a result, medical school applications have risen nearly 18%, which is truly uncharted territory.⁴ We believe that the spike in medical school applications can be seen as a diamond in the rough, metaphorically representing a positive outcome from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is easy to focus on what was lost during this year, but we should have high hopes for the future, as people have been inspired and motivated to learn more about medicine and contribute to the overall health of society with the intentions to prevent a COVID-type situation from ever catching us flat-footed again in our lifetime.

It was a year to reconnect with things that we lost over time. All over social media, families and friends stuck in quarantine together used this time to escape to the kitchen and subsequently turned it into a bakery. There were stories that, despite not making the front page, warmed the hearts of millions — “Quarantine saved my marriage”. Once a lost form of communication, especially among the millennial generation, phone calls became prevalent again, and with the help of Zoom, virtual “drinking” ensued. Moreover, as a society, we began to utilize and focus on what we had rather than delving into what we want. Some would argue that we had no choice, but we believe this was a prime example of humanity demonstrating resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. Board games and puzzles allowed us to channel our inner-childhood again, while kettlebells and tension bands kept our mind-body connection tethered just long enough to outlast a nation-wide shutdown. Once the world completely opens up its arms to society again, it will be interesting to see how people

readjust to the ‘new normal’. Some may feel reluctant to assimilate back into old patterns and the old way of life for fear of COVID-19, but perhaps the majority will re-enter society with a new appreciation of life instead. Notably, COVID-19 appeared to have directly caused a reduction in CO₂ emissions.⁵ With fewer cars on the roads and people working from home, there is less traffic congestion, which has resulted in an 8.8% drop in global CO₂ emissions when compared to the same period in 2019.⁵ It is no surprise that when the world opens its arms to society again that our interests will likely shift back to what consumed our former minds but it is also encouraging to hope that perhaps we can see people playing chess in parks again.

The devastating losses we have endured this year will forever leave a hole in our hearts. The racial injustice we continue to face rages on. However, 2020 has left us with room to breathe. With a tumultuous year behind us we can now strive to enact everlasting change for the betterment of society. We have neglected the culture and ways of life of others for years. The malicious events of the year 2020 opened our eyes to such atrocities which will hopefully result in strides towards inclusion and unification rather than disassembly. Xenophobia against Asian Americans as a direct consequence of COVID-19 was at an all-time high.^{6,7} In spite of this, *Parasite* won the Oscar for best picture — a first for an international and Korean film. The Bangtan Sonyeondan craze continued globally and was featured as *Time Magazine’s* 2020 Entertainer of the Year.⁸ Moreover, history was made when the United States saw its first woman of color and Asian American Vice President, Kamala Harris, elected amid the Black Lives Matter protest. Collectively, the public marched the streets for a singular movement to combat racial and LGBTQ discrimination in hopes for a better future for all. In May 2020, Crayola announced its release of a new set of crayons that will allow children to better reflect the world.⁹ Despite COVID-19 placing the spotlight on the atrocities that are still prevalent in today’s society, we must ride the momentum of the major movements for racial and LGBTQ justice through 2021 and beyond as we strive towards a better world.

Needless to say, 2020 was a whirlwind and will likely have its own chapter dedicated to the history books in the years to come. It was not a year to check things off of a bucket list. Instead, it was a year to count our blessings and find value in simple things; baking banana bread, connecting with friends and family, being fully present, and realizing how short life is. It was a year to be grateful for all we have and knowing that is simply enough. It was also a year that may serve as a catapult into a more progressive, accepting, and promising world for medicine and humankind alike. The year 2020 was not easy, so remember to commend yourself for making it this far.

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