

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

# SOLVING PROBLEMS AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: LIFE DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

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*Just when we all most need the renewal and camaraderie provided by the SGIM annual meeting, we find ourselves needing to find new and innovative ways to stay connected to each other and to our overarching missions as a field and as an organization.*

**"At some point, everything's gonna go south on you...everything's going to go south and you're going to say, this is it. This is how I end. Now you can either accept that, or you can get to work. That's all it is. You just begin. You do the math. You solve one problem...and you solve the next one...and then the next. And if you solve enough problems, you get to come home. All right, questions?"**

**—The Martian, 2015**



This quote resonates within me as I write this, my first *Forum* column as president, in late March 2020, deep in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak. Instead of putting the final touches on what was to be a spectacular meeting, SGIM staff and Council have spent the past several weeks weighing alternative options as it became apparent that we would not be able to hold this annual meeting. Simultaneously, all of us are facing significant professional and personal upheaval: Student and resident educational experiences have been upended, research disrupted, etc. Our approach to clinical care has also drastically changed. On the personal front, children are home from school and social interactions are curtailed. Instead of looking forward to spending time together at the SGIM Annual Meeting, learning and connecting, we are deep in the throes of the impact of COVID-19 related activities. Just when we all most need the renewal and camaraderie provided by the SGIM annual meeting, we find ourselves needing to find new and innovative ways to stay connected to each other and to our overarching missions as a field and as an organization.

How do we carry on in the midst of such change and uncertainty? To quote *The Martian*, "you solve one problem...and you solve the next one...and then the next...if you solve enough problems, you get to come home". General internists thrive in taking a rigorous approach to solving complex problems. We are well suited

to be at the forefront of addressing the complex clinical, social, political, educational, and research aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. That said, I'd hate for us to get so caught up in solving the immediate problems that we lose sight of the priorities that we have identified as a field, as an organization, and as individuals. We must simultaneously solve the immediate problems in front of us and look to the future while staying true to our fundamental values.

In the midst of the day-to-day seemingly overwhelming tasks and issues, I find myself wondering how we will function differently when we are past the peak of this pandemic. What lessons will we learn from this experience that will fundamentally change the way we work, care for patients, and interact? There is much innovation occurring. I encourage all of us to capture this innovation and apply it to addressing the following fundamental priorities as a field and organization:

1. rapidly expanding the delivery of care through virtual health means.
2. learning how to stay connected with each other through new means.
3. challenging ourselves with interacting with learners in new ways.

What can we learn from these experiences that will facilitate the delivery of high-value, evidence-based person-centered and community-oriented health care?

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In these times of change and uncertainty, SGIM, too, is learning new means of connecting with and providing value to you, the members. SGIM staff, Council, Committees, and Commissions are identifying effective approaches to

moving forward our shared priorities. We will solve the problems together and SGIM will remain our professional home. Even though we weren't able to meet in person this May, let's be purposeful about connecting with each other and

with our personal and professional missions.

Share your experiences, continue to build and enhance our community, and we will achieve our mutual goals.

**SGIM**