

# In it for the long haul



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**T**hose of you that know me, know that I am not a patient person. When I am injured or have surgery, I give myself a whole 48 hours to heal and then I want to go back to work or at least get moving again (yes, I realise as I age that is not the most realistic plan!). So, all the isolation and quarantine and PPE to fight COVID-19 is getting a little old! How have patients and their families fared?

The Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports from the US Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2020) reported that as of June 30, 2020, because of concerns about COVID-19, an estimated 41% of US adults had delayed or avoided medical care, including urgent or emergency care (12%) and routine care (32%) (CDC, 2020). Avoidance of urgent or emergency care was more prevalent among unpaid caregivers for adults, persons with underlying medical conditions, Black adults, Hispanic adults, young adults and persons with disabilities.

We have certainly witnessed this trend in wound care. More people are being seen after trying to ignore the wound or using various home remedies to treat it. Of course, doing an initial evaluation over a phone with a camera is nearly impossible and provides little usable information and much less intervention.

How are individuals surviving mentally? Anxiety initially rose in most people, with worries over catching this unknown disease and being out of work. Healthcare workers were caught in a unique triangle, caring for patients with contagious illness to provide an income for their families while trying to keep the family safe from harm. But as we compare our responses to the COVID-19 pandemic,

perhaps the more difficult area was staying home, doing nothing and not seeing anyone in person. We can rise up to do something hard — in fact, society's actions during war is one of the most profound examples of how people will rally around a cause, sacrifice for the good of all and enjoy the feeling of being productive in the sense of "I helped".

But many people had to shelter alone for weeks if not months. We are social animals — we gain and maintain our identity through our interactions with others, helping others, talking to others and eating meals with others. How are patients doing? They are the same, perhaps more anxious, more depressed about the uncontrollable nature of this virus, more concerned about surviving the long haul.

When you examine your patients, in person or over an electronic medium, ask about their mental health. Of course, you can think about this from a wound healing view because high levels of stress hormones (epinephrine, norepinephrine and cortisol) are detrimental to healing. But think about it from a human view: people need to know someone is concerned enough about them to ask how they are really doing, not just "is the wound healing?". We are all in this for the long haul. My Dad was asked to serve in the army and did so in World War II. All I am being asked to do is stay home and take care of those people I care for. It's a small price to pay in the long run.

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### References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) Delay or avoidance of medical care because of COVID-19-related concerns — United States, June 2020. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 69(36): 1250–7