

1 **Title:** Adapting to COVID-19: New Orleans Medical Students Respond

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6 **About the author:** Jacob F. Boudreaux is a fourth-year medical student at the University of
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8 on two continents, is located in Queensland, Australia and Louisiana, United States.

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25 **Discussion Points:**

- 26 1. New Orleans, LA was one of the hardest hit cities by Covid19. How did its medical students respond?
27 2. Upended by Covid19, medical students respond by volunteering, supporting their community.
28 3. With their clinical rotations canceled, medical students adapt to Covid19 in innovative ways.

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30 **Publisher's Disclosure:** *This is a PDF file of an unedited manuscript that has been accepted for publication.
31 As a service to our readers and authors we are providing this early version of the manuscript. The manuscript
32 will undergo copyediting, typesetting, and review of the resulting proof before it is published in its final citable
33 form. Please note that during the production process errors may be discovered which could affect the content,
34 and all legal disclaimers that apply to the journal pertain.*

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1 **THE EXPERIENCE.**

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3 During the month of March 2020, what was initially viewed as an invisible disease in distant China became an
4 ever-present reality to hundreds of millions of Americans, as fears of the novel coronavirus began to cause
5 mass cancellations of sporting events and gatherings, a nation-wide physical distancing policy, and shortages
6 of surgical masks and cleaning supplies.^{1,2} These new practices saw the closing of schools nationwide and
7 increased feelings of isolation as sheltering in place and frequent handwashing were the only known
8 preventative measures in combating viral spread. For medical students, this pandemic brought many changes
9 to the traditional third and fourth year of medical education, where students complete rotations in surgery,
10 medicine, obstetrics, and psychiatry and posed challenges to adapting medical rotations to online and virtual
11 learning. Despite these challenges, medical students throughout the New Orleans area, a region particularly
12 impacted during the early pandemic, responded to these challenges in innovative ways. The city's first
13 diagnosed case of Covid19 was March 9th, and the medical student response began shortly after.³

14
15 There are three medical schools located in New Orleans: Louisiana State University School of Medicine, Tulane
16 University School of Medicine, and University of Queensland/Ochsner Clinical School. Each school responded
17 to the coronavirus by moving the majority of instruction to online learning modules and video conferenced
18 lectures, while students were removed from the clinical environment due to shortages of PPE and the risk of
19 exposure. Unable to assist in delivering patient care during the pandemic in a hospital setting, dozens of medical
20 students found a way to contribute to their communities through answering Covid19 phone lines, organizing
21 blood drives and PPE donations, assisting with free food delivery services, or setting up virtual visits for those
22 with symptoms to see a physician.

23
24 Students at Louisiana State University volunteered outside the clinical setting and organized a community drive
25 entitled "Spirit of Charity" for PPE donation from local clinics, veterinary hospitals, and local businesses that
26 yielded thousands of masks for health care workers on the frontlines. As the disease spreads respiratory
27 droplets, these supplies were critical to prevent viral spread among health care workers. Students additionally
28 encouraged blood donations throughout the community. Because of fears of contracting the novel coronavirus,
29 many blood banks throughout the region experienced increased need as their reserves ran low. Local medical
30 students increased public awareness of the need to donate blood and that it can be done safely with low risk.
31 Additionally, during physical distancing measure, students were able to participate in food delivery programs
32 created around the city for vulnerable residents that were unable to leave their homes during this time of social
33 isolation.

34
35 At Tulane School of Medicine, students operated one of the city's largest PPE donation sites, where members
36 of the public donated spare masks and gloves to be used by frontline staff. Phone lines were also established
37 where students volunteered to call elderly community members to check in on how they were doing during social
38 distancing, providing mental health support for those most at-risk for contracting the virus. In order to support
39 those in health care who might have young children, Tulane students additionally organized a free childcare
40 system for frontline workers who were called to work longer hours in the hospitals.

1 University of Queensland /Ochsner Clinical School third- and fourth-year students operated a specific telephone
2 hotline where they triaged patients for potential Covid19 infection, recommended testing sites with up-to-date
3 testing guidelines, and answered general questions and concerns about signs and symptoms of infection to
4 those wanting to learn to recognize the virus and avoid its spread. When students staffed the triage line, the
5 average wait time decreased from nearly 2½ hours to only a few minutes. This was a great opportunity to
6 practice telephone communication, history taking, and triage skills while performing a needed service during a
7 challenging time. UQ/Ochsner students also staffed a dedicated obstetric Covid19 hotline where concerns
8 specific to pregnancy and coronavirus were answered. Additionally, some students who had a background in
9 clinical research helped to develop and implement a rapid testing program at the hospital.

10
11 More broadly, these reactions were not limited to medical students in Louisiana. Across the United States,
12 similar community-based volunteer programs began to be drafted, implemented, and lead by medical students
13 who were uniquely positioned “to help answer many questions of [their] friends, loved ones, and neighbors” and
14 to utilize their “work ethic, leadership skills, and social skills to meet the wide-range of needs of [their]
15 community.”⁴ No matter the location, medical students demonstrated a deep understanding of their local
16 communities’ needs and the role that they could play in addressing them, whether it be hosting PPE or blood
17 donation drives, childcare services, or educational outreach. This ability to understand the needs of their
18 patient populations and how to best effect change in the community will be an advantageous skill for future full
19 and empathetic practice.

20
21 As a medical student during the beginning of the pandemic, I found it challenging to adjust to the deluge of
22 information, health recommendations, and mounting infection count, which seemed to increase at an alarming
23 rate, but it was alongside my fellow medical students that we were able to form a united response to the
24 pandemic. Every medical student was impacted by the novel coronavirus, and all students demonstrated ways
25 in which their skills could benefit their community. This pandemic upended the usual progression of medical
26 studies, but students throughout Louisiana—and across the United States—rose to the occasion and found
27 unique opportunities where their training, dedication, and knowledge could be put to good use. Now more than
28 six months into the pandemic, most medical students have returned to the wards under new Covid19
29 guidelines, limiting their potential exposure to the virus. Despite their return to rotations under this new normal,
30 medical students are continuing to serve their communities through ongoing educational outreach,
31 demonstrating the value of mask-wearing, and speaking about the importance of following physical distancing
32 guidelines with friends, family, and the public. Through the trials of these last several months, the medical
33 student response to the novel coronavirus has displayed one of the most important skills required for clinical
34 practice: adaptation.

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