

The story of the American Immigrants achieving great things is a cornerstone of the American self-image. Hard work and sacrifice are seen as positives in this society, but during the pandemic and subsequent lockdown I wonder aloud: At what cost? Over the course of my life, I have had to refuse and even lose friends over my dedication to getting into medical school. I have disappointed my parents and missed birthdays. While I do not count my sacrifices in “hours worked,” I do count them in “opportunities missed,” in “moments I missed forever.” The overwork of medical professionals during the Covid-19 pandemic, has highlighted to me the importance of self-care now more than ever to avoid the eventual physician burnout we all fear.

As the pandemic started and everything was shut down, I realized I was no longer staying at home just to study. Now, I could no longer leave my room for fear of catching the virus that had taken the lives of so many. And as the days slowly dragged by, I thought I could combat the anxiety by reflecting on positive memories in my life. Childhood recollections abounded of course. I don't know if anything will top my joy of being accepted into medical school, but as time progressed, I tried to remember: exactly what have I done in my adult life? I have always prided myself in being a hard worker, however, what have I given up along the way? This theme constantly nags at not only my sense of self-worth but also casts a shadow over all of my accomplishments.

In light of the stressors of the first pandemic we have experienced in over a century, I am not alone in struggling to maintain self-care. Suffocating under additional layers of PPE that we are not used to wearing, and working longer hours that we have ever worked before, it has been a crushing burden both physically and emotionally this time. Called from different wards and different specialties, we have all been asked to give up something for patient care, some of us struggling with our own mental burdens, and many of us emotionally numb to patients and the pandemic even before the end. We have had to see so many young and healthy patients to die, people who should not have died in the first place. We had to become their family when their family could not be there.

Conversely, at a time when nothing else matters but the fight to survive, when there are so many rules and regulations to limit travel, I want to go out more than ever before. I want to go home and take care of my parents; I want to visit friends that I have not seen for years. In this time of COVID I feel it is more important than ever to decide what is truly important. My future and career have always been my focus, but what is a future without a past? Therefore, I have decided to no longer let life pass me by. School is still a top priority in my life, but I am trying to find a proper balance. Academia is important, but there is so much more to life than studies. In light of this, I have joined the wellness committee at my clinical site to enlighten others about my experiences. One day, when Covid-19 is no longer epidemic, I want to visit other states and even countries. I want to spend more time with friends and family, I want to focus on my hobbies. I want to learn new hobbies, skills and languages. I want to be a well-rounded person who is happy physically, psychologically, emotionally and intellectually to be the best advocate for my future patients. Until then, I will keep adding to my vision board of new things I want to achieve when all the fear and suffering has passed. Until that day of hope and new beginnings, I will advocate for everyone in this field to take proper care of themselves regardless of where healthcare ends up.