

# MAYO CLINIC PROCEEDINGS

## Innovations, Quality & Outcomes

### A Helping Hand

As hospitals around the country and the world fill with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) patients, the workers within them are growing weary. Resources are scarce, personal protective equipment limited, beds full, and tempers frayed. Fatigue is etched on the faces of our colleagues and laced in the voices of our friends. Our communities go into lockdown, and the number of COVID-19 patients drops for a while. Then human nature kicks in and people rebel against the constraints, and cases begin to rise again.

We continue to care for our patients through it all, whether as a nurse or phlebotomist, in Environmental Services or Internal Medicine, in the Emergency Department or the Intensive Care Unit. For some it's a chance to rise up and validate life; for others the strain threatens to break them. It is too easy to become isolated. Smiles are hidden by masks, and the hard elbow bump has replaced the warm handshake — at a time when we need our human bonds more than ever.

Innovation has given us many tools in the fight. Telemedicine has blossomed, enabled by expedited legislation and the pervasiveness of technology. The identification of the virus, and development of vaccines, goes at breathtaking pace, unfathomable just a few years ago. And there is also a simpler kind of innovation, one that doesn't rely on technology, but it is just as important: designing new models of teamwork to take on the pandemic.

When the Hospital Medicine services fill with COVID-19 patients, we don't let our teams drown in work. Elective surgical cases

are rescheduled; outpatient nurses and doctors come on hospital service. Pediatrics, Family Medicine, Cardiology, Neurology, and many other specialties are all willing to take care of patients on their services that they normally wouldn't manage. Fellows stand ready to rotate immediately into the hospital should the call arise. New services which would have taken months of debate come online in days. This is proactive innovation. It's not flashy technology, but something more basic: the collective engagement of the human spirit approaching a critical problem with humility, altruism, and compassion.



As I sat in my studio one night with my acrylics to lay down some paint, I realized none of us is alone in these treacherous viral currents. We are all adrift in a sea of COVID-19. We hope for buoyancy yet know there is a risk of going under. At times, the shore appears to recede in the distance; then, from dryland, a helping hand reaches down, and offers to pull us up to safety. Will the helping hand bring us to shore? Or will we pull the helper in with us? We are always just one wave away from drowning. Will we remember our friends who are still in the water, treading through their exhaustion, trying to stay afloat? Nothing is

certain, except that we must continue to fight — and keep reaching out our hands.

**Jamie Newman, MD, MHA**

Mayo Clinic  
Rochester, MN

**Potential Competing Interests:** The author reports no potential competing interests.

**Correspondence:** Address to Jamie Newman, MD, MHA, Mayo Clinic, 200 1<sup>st</sup> ST SW, Rochester, MN 55902 ([Newman.James@Mayo.Edu](mailto:Newman.James@Mayo.Edu); Twitter: [@Newmanities](https://twitter.com/Newmanities)).

**ORCID**

Jamie Newman:  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9736-7989>