

## **Adapting Clinical Medical Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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### **Background:**

In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a pause of clinical rotations for CU Medical students. In an effort to conserve resources and to reduce overall exposure, clinical educators adapted a new model that allowed for meaningful involvement in patient care in a safe format. An innovative approach to a transition of care quality improvement project was utilized. There are little reports in the literature of utilizing this project during a pandemic to learn about the patient experience of recovering from the disease, as a means to improve patient outcomes and the impact of learning in this model on students.

### **Objective:**

The objectives of the study was for medical students to follow patients that were hospitalized with COVID-19 transitioning back to their home environments. Medical students would evaluate care of patients during hospitalization, improve the transition of care process and gain knowledge about the patient experience of recovery.

### **Methods:**

All patients hospitalized with COVID-19 at UCH Memorial Central and North Hospitals from March-September of 2020 were identified for inclusion. Medical students reviewed patient's charts, obtained verbal consent and administered a questionnaire about the experience of recovering from COVID-19. Data on the patient hospitalization was compiled. During a weekly meeting, evolving themes were used to improve the transition of care process in real time and feedback was given to care teams currently caring for COVID-19 patients. A thematic analysis was conducted of responses to personal impact. A structured interview of faculty was performed to understand the impact of the project.

### **Results:**

Of the 164 patients identified, 66 consented to be interviewed. Medical students presented data on hospitalization and qualitative themes to executive leadership to improve systems related to care of COVID-19 patients. The transition of care process was changed to improve patient outcomes including adding mental well-being resources when significant themes of emotional distress were discovered. Stories of patient appreciation were shared with care teams to improve morale. Themes of the beneficial impact of this project on students included: ability to learn long term outcomes of a novel pandemic, learn from patients in a longitudinal format, connect with isolated patients, develop skills of connecting through phone contact with patients, learn from chart review process and empower students as experts in a novel pandemic. Two additional Quality Improvement projects were started by students based on themes of the patient experience.

### **Conclusions:**

We believe this study was a success in achieving its objectives. Students found this project to be

a meaningful way to continue to improve clinical skills and participate in patient care during the unique challenges of a pandemic. Students were directly involved in the discovery and dissemination of knowledge of a novel pandemic and were empowered to advocate for patients as experts in the patient experience. More study of the beneficial impact of learning in this model is likely warranted.