

## **Current Gaps in Medical Education Illustrated by COVID-19: Interviews with Physicians**

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### **Introduction:**

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented uncertainty and drastic changes that illuminated some of the existing flaws in our healthcare system. We sought to explore these challenges as opportunities to guide transformational improvements in medical education curriculum.

### **Methods:**

Physicians across Colorado from various medical specialties were interviewed regarding the impact of the pandemic. Audio files of the interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and tallied according to a list of systematically established themes. The final data was reviewed to identify common themes that represented opportunities to create a positive transformation to medical education.

### **Results:**

Thirty-one physicians across 20 different medical specialties and sub-specialties were interviewed within the month of April 2020. Analysis of the interviews identified several common themes including significant mental health impact, a lack of data to drive clinical decisions, challenges in communication with patients and families, and a disproportionate impact of the pandemic on underserved communities. A follow-up survey of proposed innovative medical education solutions was administered in January 2022 with most respondents agreeing with the proposed solutions. These included ways to encourage more critical thinking and to incorporate more formal education on public health policy and economics.

### **Conclusions:**

The identified themes are universal in the field of medicine and highlight gaps in our healthcare system that were already present but not readily apparent. We believe that the best way to effect change is to incorporate these topics into medical education to help future physicians be able to make complex decisions, lead in the face of uncertainty, be adept at various modes of patient communication, and be well-versed in public health topics to address inequity in medicine.