



Linda Brodsky Memorial Journal

COVID-19 Precipitated the Importance of Social Movements and Physician Capacity for Global Impact

Leah Sarah Peer

The beauty of life is in its shades of colours, lightness and darkness, heartbreak and healing, sadness and happiness, laughter and tears. If there is anything, I am grateful for, it is the gift of life.

The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a reminder that we are truly citizens of the world, and that global health has become more equitable for all the wrong reasons. Novelty, elevated socioeconomic status is not a barrier to infection by the same virus and its subsequent ramifications on health. As a society I realize that we are fortunately served by frontline workers in the delivery

of care, scientists in the race for a vaccine, and grocery workers keeping shelves stocked. At the same time, I worry about the people in my life, my parents, my friends, and the immunocompromised who are susceptible to deadly and infectious diseases. I think about my professors and healthcare providers as doctors, nurses, and those in the service industry or in policy leadership roles forced to face this pandemic head on.

In many ways, technology has connected us beyond borders and allowed for ingenuity, problem solving and pragmatism. With the transition to online platforms, we can recognize “digital poverty” and its impact on inter-population disparity worldwide. When chaos clouded individual judgment and the spread of misinformation arose as an “info-demic” of the century, I understood the importance of doing our part to prevent future pandemics from being as devastating.

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As a medical student, I joined a movement called #Students_Against_COVID striving to improve the health and wellbeing of all people in all nations across the world. Through social media, campaigns were created by students like myself to inform communities internationally to eliminate avoidable disease, disability and death. Additionally, an advocate sees beyond the bounds of patient needs and into the socio-economic systems and cultural traditions. It is educating and working to ameliorate the suffering of populations and threats to human health. As a French translator within the movement, I translated health campaigns for communities in Africa and also spearheaded the Asylum Seekers & Refugees Health initiative that raises awareness about the plight of migrants, refugees, and the harsh realities they face.

Through the 3Sister's Foundation, I advocate for the health and wellbeing of the Yemeni people suffering from the worst humanitarian crisis. As an intern, I created an advocacy toolkit, the first of its kind advocating for international aid, so that the American population is aware of the atrocities of the Yemeni Healthcare Crisis. I serve an active student member of

Physicians for Human Rights to advocate for vulnerable populations, administer asylum seeker evaluations and write affidavit reports.

In my endeavours to serve humanity, this past year has been an opportunity for me to learn more deeply about my community and to understand health through other peoples' perspectives. My passions inspired a podcast of my own to shed light and give a voice to the people, causes, and organizations serving humanity.

As Mr. Trump leaves office, we must never forget the kind of policies and political sentiment that enabled his election in the first place. We must also remember the communities and groups that were the most marginalized by the Trump administration - people of colour, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and Indigenous Americans, among others. Record turnout among many of these communities helped deliver the election for Mr. Biden. Although I doubt the Biden-Harris administration will implement radical change, if America has learned

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anything from 2016, now's the chance to show it.

Learning from contemporary social movements such as #blacklivesmatter, the greatest problem as human beings is not how to continue but how to leave a legacy. The meaning of our existence stems from reconciling liberty with service, of the passing with the lasting, and of our attempts to weave the threads of temporality into the fabric of eternity. The deepest wisdom that man can attain is to know that his destiny is to aid, serve, to create an impact.

With a vision to save lives, eradicate disease and to improve equity in health, I became part of student advocacy groups as well as global movements born out of this very pandemic. Being part of these groups on a quest to serve emphasized the power of collective action in thinking locally and aiming globally. I realised that we have to conquer in order to succumb; we have to acquire in order to give away; we have to triumph in order to be overwhelmed. The aspiration lies in goodness while the perfection in its dispersal.

Through my experiences interacting with communities and individuals this year, my conviction to serve humanity foremost was strengthened. This eternal drive to improve the human condition forces me to think about primacy of the individual within society and the universal versus relativist approaches to rights, positive and negative freedoms.

Becoming a physician, this understanding will help me treat my patients and to be a better human being. The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic made me aware of the obstacles I will have to face in medicine, but I am more certain than ever that it is my calling. I aspire to leave my mark in the world and to become a doctor without borders, not an ordinary medical doctor but one that will surpass boundaries and change the traditional definition of the word itself.

The scientific, social and cultural learnings from this era, and the stories of those who helped tackle this crisis will guide future discoveries. Although the quest for world peace and mutual respect for all human

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beings remains an ideal, the pandemic has demonstrated that advocating for human rights, my patients and for access to healthcare is something I will continue fighting for. The world is imperfect but compassionate care and the ambition of a few are enough to make a difference.

Biography



Leah Sarah Peer is a medical student at Saint James School of Medicine in Chicago, Illinois class of 2022. Originally from Montreal, Quebec, she graduated from

Concordia University in 2018 with a Bachelor of Science, Specialization in Biology, and a Minor in Human Rights.

During her undergrad, she volunteered with many community initiatives traveling to Indigenous & rural areas of Quebec to educate and instill a passion for science within children. Through her interactions with vulnerable populations in Canada, Costa Rica, South Africa, and Anguilla, Leah was inspired to embark on her own advocacy journey. Mingling her passion for medicine with her human rights endeavours she aspires to serve humanity.

Leah is also involved with many local and global humanitarian projects in the fields of global health, social justice and the provision of medical care for underserved communities across the world. Her aim is to become a diverse, committed and compassionate leader in public service as a global health changemaker, human rights advocate and physician in caring for life.