

# Reflections from Steamboat Springs Family Medicine: Looking back on two years of uncertainty, adversity and more than a few silver linings

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## Steamboat Springs Family Medicine For Steamboat Pilot & Today

Since the beginning of COVID-19, we have recognized the truth of philosopher George Santayana's oft-quoted 1905 writing – “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” – and looked for lessons from the 1918 Spanish flu, the deadliest pandemic of the 20th century.

Much was different, yet so much the same. There was no testing, treatments or ability to prevent the virus then beyond shutdowns, masking, distancing and staying home when sick. Personal protective equipment, or PPEs, didn't exist beyond thin cloth masks used by the public. Children, parents and many of the working population were among the millions of fatalities. Super spreader events included church gatherings and war parades. Temporary tents were set up at maxed out hospitals.

Today, we are able to swiftly identify COVID-19, track variants, treat with therapeutics, and prevent with vaccines. However, we still utilized some centuries-old public health measures, and our ultimate count of infections and deaths may be as much of an approximation as they were in 1918.

Now at the two-year mark, we look ahead and hope we are at or nearing the end. We also look back, to learn from our personal piece of history, shared below.



Rosanne Iversen

• **Rosanne Iversen, MD** – Through adversity, growth happens. The fear and uncertainty during the shutdown reminded me of how my world felt when I was diagnosed with cancer a decade earlier.

What I found then, and now, was the opportunity to grow. I learned then that asking for help is a strength, not a weakness. During the last two disrupted years, some relationships didn't last, but others became stronger, and new ones were formed.

Medicine advanced by leaps and bounds with our understanding of not just COVID, but of pharmaceuticals and vaccines. We embraced these gains in medicine at our practice by offering testing, holding vaccine clinics, permanently adopting telemedicine and strengthening our commitment to patient education via emails, webinars and outdoor sessions.

When I look back at how we stayed connected and informed, and will continue to do so, I see more growth. As we put the darkest days of the pandemic behind us, I take heart in the silver linings.

• **Josh Welch, MD** – I look back with gratitude. During the pandemic, as a community we pulled together and lifted one another up more often than I can ever remember.

As I thought about my role in medicine, I recognized what I valued most was the time to develop meaningful personal connections with my patients and their families. I am forever grateful that I found the opportunity to do that by joining Steamboat Springs Family Medicine last year.

In a changed world where so many had been isolated physically and emotionally, the ability to really know my patients and provide them with individualized attention has never been more important. And as we emerge from the pandemic, caring for patients in this way will continue to be the source of my greatest personal and professional satisfaction.

• **Julie Kinkler, MSN, AGNP-C** — Fighting COVID renewed my passion for preventive care. When COVID shut the world down, I drove to California to help on the frontlines. It was the most difficult experience in my seven years as an ER nurse. I talked to countless family members on the phone asking me to relay messages to loved ones they may never see again.

My patients were alone and scared, and I held their hands as they pleaded with me not to let them die from this unknown virus. I resolved to find a new beginning where I could make a difference before anyone reached the ER doors — and found it when I joined Steamboat Springs Family Medicine last year.

On my first day, vaccines had just been extended to the general public, and we were giving shots to everyone we could in the office parking lot. Those devastating weeks in California drove me: Every vaccine I gave was one less person whose hand would need holding during their last moments, every person I helped educate was one less family member to be notified with tragic news.

I am now able to prevent much of the needless suffering I witnessed as a bedside ER nurse. The need for preventive medicine will not end if and when COVID becomes endemic, but continue to powerfully impact the entire spectrum of health. I look forward to advocating for patients for many years to come.

• **Hannah Meyer, MSN, FNP-BC**: Becoming a mom in these uncertain times has changed my perspective. As an experienced nurse, I felt my calling keenly when the world shut down two years ago and signed on to work with the vulnerable population at our local long-term care facility who were suffering greatly.

The following year, I found myself dealing with the effects of COVID at the other end of the age spectrum when I became pregnant with my first child. My husband and I experienced a mix of excitement, joy and uncertainty.

Our questions ranged from the pragmatic — Did the COVID vaccine I just had affect our child? — to the more existential — How are we going to bring a baby into this world during a pandemic?

As more research became available I was reassured the vaccine was the best way to protect our little one and received the second shot. Camden Marie was born in September with a clean bill of health. She is thriving at 6 months old, and I am reminded daily of the blessings of having a child, despite, or maybe especially, during a pandemic.

I ask more questions than ever, always with an open mind, and remain fiercely committed to protecting everyone around me — family, patients, friends, co-workers and community.



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