

Goodbye 2020

Dec 20, 2020 | 0  | [challenges](#), [COVID-19](#), [digital health](#), [mental health](#), [ontheblogs](#)

At the end of each year, we ask [our contributors](#) and [team](#) to take a minute to reflect on the year that was, and tell us about what they've learnt, the challenges faced and positive perspectives to come from the year.

It is safe to say that 2020 was not the year we expected it to be. [COVID-19](#) has brought with it new challenges, yet amidst the chaos there have been many opportunities. This year, the year where everything changed, the onthewards team share their observations and experiences, and remind us of what really matters.

We are all one community

Positive things from a medical perspective: I recall the camaraderie amongst colleagues emboldened by the duty to care we have for patients and each other - I think [this pandemic](#) more than anything has really shown us that irrespective of subspecialty divisions - we are all one community and collectively share a single purpose.

Secondly, this pandemic has catalyzed the implementation and adoption of [telemedicine](#) services. As we've all become more comfortable with its use I think it will stick (even if not necessarily to the same degree) and hopefully lead to improved care for patients - especially those living in rural and remote communities.

- Elie Matar

Gratitude - being born and living in Australia in the age of COVID

A sense of gratitude, that my 16-year-old orphaned mother and child-bride-to-be boarded a plane on her own bound for Sydney in the 50s. It was a toss up between Australia, USA, Canada. That my rebellious illegal immigrant father got caught and turned away from the USA, but with helping hands managed to get into and settle in Australia.

What usually takes 10 years took 10 weeks to implement

What we can accomplish when we need to, with limited barriers and mass collaboration. Seeing all Australian and New Zealand medical schools work together tirelessly throughout the pandemic, and approaches on how to move their medical programs online. Supporting their local and international medical students who were 'stuck' overseas throughout the year, and were unaware of the effort being made by medical educators to keep things moving head, behind the scenes, and still managing to ensure that their students graduated.

Technology

Telehealth is here to stay though perhaps not to the same degree. Online communication tools have been so important. Allowing us to connect, share, collaborate and remain productive in a chaotic year. I loved seeing those in the medical industry that were initially hesitant about using technology, move to a space of delight and accomplishment when they learnt how to navigate it. Excited about what's next and all the positives that emerging tech and communication brings.

Challenges are the same as everyone else - not being able to travel, social distancing.. the amount of preparation and work that needed to be done in a limited time frame (moving online) was stressful but rewarding. Thankfully friends and family have been safe, even when living in overseas hotspots.

- *Evangelie Polyzos*

The camaraderie and the unexpected benefits of staying at home

The camaraderie and pulling together was great. More widespread adoption of telehealth is a fantastic development. In NSW our ability to have a practice run for a pandemic that didn't really eventuate has been great so we're all better prepared if it does hit us later on. Taking time to explore NSW on holiday rather than going overseas - I doubt I would have gone out to Lightning Ridge and that far west otherwise. The decrease in clinical load in ED back in March and April which gave us a very welcome respite from the daily onslaught (seems to have gone back to normal or even worse now unfortunately!).

All the memes!

The delivery of teaching by [Zoom](#) which has allowed people to tap into resources outside their normal hospital. Catching up with friends over Zoom and weirdly keeping in better contact with old med school friends because we were more socially isolated here and not able to travel so made the effort to have Zoom quizzes and drinks, etc.

The focus on [research](#) and development for vaccines and science and the increased funding because of this.

The massive decrease in flu this year. Almost non-existent.

The amount of money I saved by not going on holiday overseas with the family. My bank balance has never looked so healthy!

The price of Bitcoin going up so much as people hedged against governments turning on the printing presses to stimulate the economy. My holdings are doing rather well now!

Having the kids at home for several months during the home-schooling period. Whilst it was hard becoming a teacher overnight it was great to have them around so much and

have some quality family time.

- Jules Willcocks

Perspectives on positive things to come from the year

- The widespread use of telehealth
- Greater community awareness of important public health messages (including infection prevention messages, contact tracing, and important mental health messages)
- Online learning opportunities, and online socialising opportunities, including making better use of social media

Challenges

- Continually adapting to changes in public health recommendations, adapting our practice policies constantly, and communicating these changes to our community
- Isolation from friends and family during lockdown
- The constant fight against burnout

Lessons learnt

- The importance of being clear, consistent, and fair when communicating about public health recommendations and our practice policies
- The profound importance of kindness in a year which has been difficult for so many

- Elizabeth Campbell

An overseas fellowship, the importance of relationships, and the challenge of the pandemic

Doing [an overseas fellowship was the highlight of my medical training/life to date](#) and I will be recommending it to anyone who is remotely interested – I had a fantastic experience at the [Drug Development Unit at the Royal Marsden Hospital](#), made many friends and came back with a really unique skill set and confidence in having completed a fellowship with some of the leaders in cancer care in an internationally renowned institution. I started in February 2019 so had an excellent year of travel to Europe, going to numerous musicals and plays in London, visiting the many fantastic bookshops and exploring the rich cultural history of the United Kingdom.

We were in the United Kingdom for much of 2020, however, and it was a difficult and anxious time for my wife and I especially as [she fell pregnant in July](#). Returning to Australia in October was a significant logistical challenge but we have been so relieved since returning home to be with family, friends and being without the anxiety of catching [coronavirus](#).

The key lesson I learnt this year was that lockdown made it very clear that we are social creatures and relationships are fundamental to our mental health. Doctors easily deprioritise relationships through no fault of their own - we are caught up in our clinical work, non-clinical work (research, committee, helping writing blogs for websites for junior doctors) or just looking after ourselves so it becomes very simple to let family and friends fall by the wayside. Don't wait for a pandemic to call that friend and send that text!

- Abhi Pal

2020 - An unexpected year

I think it's fair to say that 2020 wasn't exactly the year we were expecting. As the year began, we were in the midst of escalating [bushfires](#). Then came storms and floods. Just as we were starting to relax, news emerged of a global pandemic.

There has been a lot of uncertainty and change for health care workers this year, and while Australia has fared better than most nations, we are not out of the woods just yet.

It hasn't been all bad. It has been fabulous to see clinical silos breaking down, with collaboration and information-sharing, resulting in system-wide innovation and redesign. On a personal note, it has been good to simplify things and slow down for a while, although, like most people, I look forward to the return of face-to-face meetings and events to catch-up with friends.

For me, while 2020 has been a long and difficult year, it shows that health systems can change, and clinicians are strongest when we work together. I send love and support to colleagues who have been affected by the fires, storms and of course the pandemic. May 2021 be more peaceful for us all.

- Clare Skinner

Appreciating what is important

This year, I really came to appreciate what was important to me, and to focus on cutting out a lot of dross that I was doing 'because I'd always done it that way'. In the end, it all revolved around people - family, friends, working teams, patients.

The main lesson I learned was just how close to capacity we all work most of the time, and the effect it has on our time, physical health, and mental health. Even though COVID touched Queensland only very lightly, the extra 10% required to plan and practise for a COVID event, develop online learning materials, and have children schooled from home during lockdown pushed many people (including myself) beyond our personal capacity. For me, this required some rapid reorganising of commitments to bring the workload back under semi-control, but I totally appreciate that this is a

privilege I have as a mum with financial stability and a doctor with leadership roles. Not everyone has that privilege and we all have to work together to look after each other.

- Rhea Liang

Thank you to all our contributors, who have taken the time during this chaotic and challenging year to write and develop medical education resources for us.

We will continue to produce practical knowledge, education and wellbeing resources for junior doctors, other healthcare professionals and medical students, so you can provide the best possible patient care, and to care for yourselves and your wellbeing.

We would like to also acknowledge Avant Mutual, Sydney Medical School, MedApps and Therapeutic Guidelines for their support of onthewards in 2020.

The onthewards team wish you a safe Christmas, New Year, and peaceful holiday season.

We will see you back here on 11 January 2021.

Related Blogs

- [Highlights and challenges of taking on an overseas Fellowship](#)
- [On being parents and front-line health workers during COVID-19](#)
- [The COVID Crisis - a Time for Mindful Medicine](#)
- [What if hospitals were run by Apple](#)
- [onthewards 2016](#)
- [Reflecting on the highs and lows of 2017 as told by the contributors of onthewards](#)
- [2017 - a year dedicated to leading for change](#)
- [Insights and highlights from the last year of the 2010s](#)

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