Whether it’s taking care of COVID+ patients in the emergency department (ED) or dealing with the social consequences, COVID-19 has greatly affected our lives. Our workdays are filled with terrified and sick patients, whose management is complicated by our continued lack of understanding of the viral pathogenesis and treatment options. But worst of all, when we finally get to leave the ED, we cannot go home and see our friends to debrief the hard day, spend time with our families, get a supportive hug, or go out and dance the stress away, even if only for a few hours. For those of you graduating this year like I am, social distancing also means no graduation party, no class photo, and no nights spent bonding with your co-residents before you all move across the country.

Despite the hardship that we endure due to the social distancing mandates, we as emergency physicians are the ones that understand the need for these measures the most. It is because of this that I wanted to share with you a few things that have helped me stay sane during this very isolating and uncertain time.

1. Use your time on a shift for social interaction
As essential workers we have the privilege to continue going to work. For us residents, this also means that we can continue spending time with our friends. Use your downtime on shift to check in on each other, tell jokes, and take wellness walks. When calling a consultant feel free to ask them how they’re doing and check in to see what’s new in their life. Your time at work can be very stressful so make sure that you capitalize on the break from social distancing.

2. Virtual games and conversations are your friends
Whether you prefer Zoom, Facetime, WhatsApp or Skype, set up virtual hangouts as much as you can. Though not as good as the real thing, a virtual happy hour or Jack-in-the-Box game night will successfully raise your spirits.

3. Get to know your co-residents
While zoom conference and FaceTime conversations have become the new norm in keeping us connected, our residency has thought of other ways to keep us entertained. One such way has been our GroupMe Truth or Dare game, through which I’ve gotten to know my residents on a deeper level and have been blown away by their creativity. I can’t wait for our future virtual trivia night.

4. Take advantage of frontline worker specials
Businesses around the country have been amazing at showing their support. Do yourself a favor and use some of these amazing deals. Get a subscription to a relaxation and mindfulness app to help you cope with the stress, sign up for free workout classes and sweat the frustration out of you, or summon the power of retail therapy. Pick one or all, but make sure that you prioritize your happiness.

5. Ask for help
You know yourself best, and only you can tell if you are feeling overwhelmed. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to friends, family, or any of the confidential counseling services for help. COVID-19 has been hard on all of us physically and emotionally. It is okay to be angry and upset by what this virus has taken from us. Know that you’re not alone and that there are many ways that we can get through this together.

And to all of you residents graduating this year: Congratulations, WE DID IT!!!

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