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BRIEF19

A daily review of covid-19 research and policy.

Breaking News

Yesterday, *Brief19* broke several stories outlining new and historic policies going into effect in some New York-area medical schools. Hospitals in the throes of the covid-19 pandemic are short-staffed. One day after New York University's Grossman School of Medicine first announced that seniors had been offered early graduation—and that those choosing to do so would be paid as first-year resident physicians (“interns”)—two other schools announced their own policies. The New York Institute of Osteopathic Medicine also offered its seniors early graduation, though no information regarding compensation, benefits, or insurance was provided to students. The Albert Einstein College of Medicine informed students that they would soon be returning to clinical duties as well, though early graduation was not offered. However, there was outcry among some students who felt that being given the “option” to volunteer during the covid-19 pandemic was coercive and an abuse of power; deans of the school informed students (including third-year students who have yet to apply to residency training programs) that those choosing to volunteer would have that service highlighted on their transcripts. The implication was that those who did not choose to participate would have gaping holes in their files that future employers might notice during next year's match cycle. Officials did not respond to our requests for comment. The American Association of Medical Colleges had not been informed of the policy prior to our reporting, but an official there said that the matter would be assessed immediately. *Brief19* exclusive.

--*Brief19* staff.

Research Briefing

How is the covid-19 pandemic affecting healthcare workers? In a study published in [JAMA Network Open](#), researchers from China surveyed 1,257 health care workers in 34 hospitals from January 29, 2020, to February 3, 2020, in China who were directly involved in caring for patients with covid-19. Healthcare workers experienced profound psychological burden caring for these patients: 50.4 percent had symptoms of depression, 44.6 percent had anxiety, 71.5 percent reported symptoms of psychological distress. Nurses, women, and frontline healthcare workers reported more severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, and distress compared to those who were either not on the frontlines nor those directly involved in patient care. Inhabitants of Wuhan were particularly affected. Will New York City become the next Wuhan?

Will the coronavirus pandemic ever end? At this point, it is too soon to say. However, that hasn't stopped researchers from forecasting possible scenarios. A recent preprint in [medRxiv](#) used complex mathematical modeling to determine the impact of social distancing on curbing the SARS-nCov-2 pandemic. The model showed that a one-time intense effort to social distance may not be enough to lower the amount of covid-19 in the U.S such that healthcare providers would be adequately able to continue to treat critically ill patients. The authors predict that there could be a lull in the summer, but that a second wave in the Fall and Winter could be in the offing. Social distancing without other interventions could push the pandemic into 2022. While this

preprint manuscript has not been peer-reviewed, it shows that we need to continue to think of strategies in addition to social distancing that can help end the pandemic.

--Joshua Niforatos MD.

POLICY BRIEFING

Cash relief, coming to a pocket near you. After six days of negotiations, the U.S. Senate finally [passed](#) the third piece of covid-19-related relief legislation before midnight last night. The relief package comes with a \$2 trillion price tag. The legislation includes direct cash payments to American of up to \$1,200 (with additional money for children), the extension of unemployment benefits to gig workers and freelancers, nearly \$1 trillion in loans to various businesses, healthcare resources to hospitals, suspended student loan payments, and finally, the ability of the government to take an equity stake in airlines. A vote in the House is expected for Friday and will head to the President's desk following passage there. *New York Times*.

Share the Wealth, SARS-CoV-2 antibodies that is. The FDA recently [announced](#) clinical trials that will study the use of "convalescent plasma" to treat severe or life-threatening covid-19 infections. Convalescent plasma is plasma (the yellow liquid component of blood that contains blood cells) donated by patients who have recovered from a covid-19 infection. The hope is that the plasma from these patients will contain circulating antibodies that will help the recipients fight off active infections. Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City was [identified](#) yesterday as a major institution undertaking this therapy. Physicians interested in using the therapy can contact the FDA for further guidance.

Hoarding Hydroxychloroquine. After hydroxychloroquine gained fame in the press as a potential cure for covid-19, many people have been eager to stock up on supplies of the drug. This includes physicians writing prescriptions for themselves and family members to secure a supply before the medicine goes on shortage. Such selfish behavior has not gone unchecked. Nevada [joins](#) a list of states including Texas and New York putting restrictions on new prescriptions for hydroxychloroquine. More states are expected to follow suit in the coming days. Hydroxychloroquine is used in treatment of conditions including lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. *NY Daily News*.

--Kimi Chernoby MD, JD.

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Brief19 is a daily executive summary of covid-19-related medical research, news, and public policy. It was founded and created by frontline emergency medicine physicians with expertise in medical research critique, health policy, and public policy.