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On the first day of class, we tell our students that the key to success in Physician Assistant (PA) school is FLEXIBILITY!

PA school is an intense academic adventure that prepares individuals for professional clinical practice in two-years. PA school is very challenging for multiple reasons. We ask our students to uproot their entire life to focus on their education and ask them for perfection—many sacrifice their financial security, hobbies, independence, and relationships.

As educators, we get to see only a glimpse of what our students experience daily. We lean on our resources to best support them with life challenges.

When COVID-19 decided to come to town, the biggest challenge was to support my students in a time of crisis. The in-person connection was something I had taken for granted. How can I show up for my students, and how can my students show up for me virtually?

Within the first week of the virtual classroom, I had many students say, "I can't do this." COVID-19 was Mt. Everest, and we hadn't been training. What superhuman power allows you to show up as an engaged "perfect" student, a caregiver, AND a grade-school teacher?

How do you find financial security when your partner is out of work too? How do you tell your 2-year-old (who so dearly wants to spend time with you) that you need 12 hours of "me time" to study? How do you share ONE computer with five other family members? Who has an internet package with that amount of data???? I sat there "face-to-face" with this crisis in the form of tears and an occasional screaming child in diapers.

Forget about family, what about all those NEW school requirements? A new schedule included juggling online Panoptos, webinars, and quizzes. In-person skill assessments transitioned to a telehealth simulation. We all learned a new way of understanding FLEXIBILITY and remembered critical lessons in embracing HUMANS!

We became resilient. We adapted to small Zoom study groups, social media connections, and weekly dress-up themes. We performed exams online with cameras watching our every move. We became worrisome if babies were not running around in the background. We sat out in the sun, discussed Anticoagulants, and laughed. We learned a new way of understanding FLEXIBILITY and remembered that we are a DIVERSE and UNIQUE group of HUMANS!

We had a student design a "stoplight" for her family, so they knew if Mom was available or studying. We also followed the development of a sinkhole in a student's driveway.

I worry that we will lose this unique human interaction upon return to the classroom. Can we reimagine a medical education that allows professional development and protection of our unique humanness? I believe that a FLEXIBLE approach to classroom learning is a start.