

Experiences During COVID-19

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I first learned of COVID-19 at the San Francisco International Airport (SFO) on January 20, 2020. My friend, Felicia, and I just flew back from South Korea, where we spent 4 days in. Before this, we had been attending a faculty-led program (FLP) in Vietnam from January 1-16. There was no mention at all of COVID-19 while we were overseas. I found out about the virus from a poster at SFO warning visitors of the outbreak happening in Wuhan, China: “For 2 weeks after leaving Wuhan-- If you feel sick with fever, cough, or have difficulty breathing, CALL A DOCTOR and TELL THE DOCTOR YOU WERE IN WUHAN.”

After seeing this, I honestly did not think much of the virus. Many people were comparing COVID-19 with the seasonal flu, so I thought, “Oh, this doesn’t seem that bad!” Sure enough, COVID-19 blew up exponentially in the United States over the next 3 weeks or so. I feel like the media coverage on the virus definitely played a determining factor on the hyped up situation for people. I know I was checking the news every day, searching up “coronavirus santa clara”. I was shocked to find out that the first person to die of COVID-19 was from our county, Santa Clara County (SCC), in mid-February. Interestingly enough, I became sick for about 2 weeks beginning February 1 to around February 16. I had symptoms of a fever, wet cough, runny and stuffy nose, and chills, too. At the time, I did not think it was coronavirus because I went to an urgent care, where the doctor diagnosed me with having a normal upper respiratory infection; I also tested negative for the flu.

During those 2 weeks, my health suffered immensely--I had to call off work twice and miss four class lectures! When I was finally able to come back to school regularly, SCC began the shelter-in-place guidelines in mid-March. There were no more on-campus classes or meetings at SJSU and dining in at restaurants was prohibited. I was starting to feel depressed because I could not see my friends anymore.

For my part-time job, I work as a receptionist at a skilled nursing facility in Santa Clara. Our company began to implement different COVID-19 guidelines as the CDC and WHO changed their guidelines. At first, we made all visitors sign-in on our visitor log sheet and answer COVID-19 related questions, such as “Are you having any flu-like symptoms?”, “Have you traveled outside the U.S. in the last 14 days?”, and “Have you been in contact with anyone with COVID-19?” As the receptionist, my job duties suddenly expanded to becoming a visitor screener. If anyone answered “YES” to the questions, our assistant administrator would be called to assess the visitor’s history. About a week later, our COVID-19 guidelines became even stricter--no visitors were allowed at all to the facility. I believe the CDC was enforcing that all nursing homes were not to allow any visitation anymore, unless they were staff, physicians, or emergency medical professionals. Many of our visitors were understanding, but there were a slight handful that hated the new policy. My coworkers and I started liking the policy because there were less people to deal with in the facility and more time to focus on our patients.

My job as a receptionist definitely became more stressful after COVID-19 began because of the multiple duties as a screener and also, since I am at the frontline in screening people, I am at a higher risk of contracting the virus. As for my personal life, I miss all of my friends and classmates dearly. Attending classes through Zoom during quarantine is not the same as in-person classes at all.