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EDITOR'S CHOICE

January blues: Exam season in a pandemic

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Although the January blues¹ might be familiar, this year's context has meant that the exam season has been more difficult than ever. If you have taken the stairs at a London tube station, you may be able to draw parallels between this month in our third national lockdown, and the feeling you get as you continue to walk round the curved staircase, thinking "surely I'm nearly there . . .", without yet being able to see daylight. Yet even as we're "buffeted by the unwelcome news of a more infective strain of covid, it feels at times as if we're nearing the end of a long tunnel, with light [vaccines] just around the corner."² If you are interested in the new strain, read Sixty seconds on . . . naming strains.³

I hope that by now those of you in your clinical stages of training have received your first dose of the vaccine. Some students spoke to *The BMJ* about their experiences of the covid-19 vaccine rollout,⁴ which highlighted disparity between trusts as well as the lack of a robust logical system for distribution. Clara Munro, editorial registrar and clinical fellow, *The BMJ*, wrote about this scattergun approach to the UK's vaccine rollout affecting the morale of healthcare workers.⁵ In addition, many students are falling into grey areas between their hospital trusts and medical schools, and their frequent rotations mean they are potentially missed in the vaccine rollout, despite being patient facing. This is particularly distressing for students who might be back on the wards and clinically vulnerable to covid-19,⁶ such as Helen Woodward and Vincenza Scannella, who wrote about their experiences. If you are interested in the vaccine and how it was made, take a look at the interview by Elisabeth Mahase (clinical reporter at *The BMJ*), with Andrew Pollard.⁷ Pollard has been leading the Oxford vaccine clinical trials in the UK, Brazil, and South Africa, and he spoke to Mahase about how the Oxford vaccine came to be, how dosing was worked out, and whether it will stand up to the new variants.

Should you find yourself in need of some cheering up, the *BMJ Student* podcast team offers two more light hearted Sharp Scratch episodes, where Agony Aunts respond to your medical school dilemmas. You can listen now on Spotify⁸,⁹ or Apple Podcasts.¹⁰,¹¹ The team was also joined by Lucy Chappell, consultant obstetrician and obstetrics research professor, to discuss attending a birth and all the surrounding emotions of seeing new life come into the world. The panel also reflected on the challenges, during placement, of balancing medical students' learning needs with patient consent and comfort, which has always been historically difficult to achieve for students. Yet there are always learning opportunities even on the busiest of wards. Millie

Perry writes about working with other members of the multidisciplinary team, as she shares her experience of learning phlebotomy.¹²

As the uncertainties¹³ and misinformation¹⁴ continue for medical students, news of the "unfair, unacceptable, and inhumane"¹⁵ treatment of their colleagues sitting the situational judgment test has sparked calls from students, the BMA, and Doctors' Association UK, for the UKFPO (United Kingdom's Foundation Programme Office) to urgently revise its exam process, and for a more student centred application process.¹⁶ If you or your course mates feel that morale is low this month, take a look at Abi Rimmer's summary of how experts boost team morale.¹⁷ They shared how showing genuine support for your colleagues, encouraging (perhaps virtual) social interaction, and promoting small acts of kindness can go a long way; and these are especially important for students while we weather the storm of the short and dark days of the exam season.

Competing interests: NN is enrolled as a medical student at the University of Manchester 2017-23.

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