

Dear Faculty, Staff and Students,

This evening I would like to share an incredible story of making a difference in the lives of others. I am sharing the experience of Student Doctor Peter Petrillo, who is currently a third-year student in the Arizona College of Osteopathic Medicine and is also a member of the Army National Guard. Prior to attending medical school he was a Physician Assistant for fifteen years and served as an Aeromedical Physician for seven years. He has given me permission to share his remarkable story.

Student Doctor Petrillo was called into active duty by the State of Arizona to respond to the growing crisis of COVID-19 in the Navajo Nation. For those of you not familiar with the Navajo Nation, it is a vast area, over 27,000 miles of land with a population of 175,000 people living in remote homesteads or isolated villages. Many generations live in the same home, and running water and electricity are often seen as a luxury. The Nation is blessed with a warm loving culture, family ties are cherished and frequently large gatherings are held. As Student Doctor Petrillo explains, “coordination of government response is complicated by the fact that the Nation straddles three states, eleven counties and three FEMA regions.” On April 4, 2020, the Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez reached out to the State of Arizona for immediate help, in a statement that read, “We don’t have the best health care on the Navajo Nation, but we are stepping up to get as much equipment as possible to help those on the frontlines.”

The Navajo Nation is one of the hardest hit by this pandemic in the country. As of today, they have reported 1206 positive cases and over 48 deaths, a very high percentage of their total population. Their hospitals have very limited intensive care beds and are lacking ventilators and other necessary supplies. The Arizona National Guard deployed a team of eight health care professionals, including Physician Assistants, Nurses, Physicians and one medical student - Midwestern University Student Peter Petrillo. This team made frequent trips to remote locations in a Blackhawk helicopter, bringing critical supplies and setting up alternative care sites.

Student Doctor Petrillo writes, “I am grateful to be in a position to be a part of this relief effort while realizing it was a crash course in hospital administration, disaster management, epidemiology, Navajo culture, tribal history and politics. I am grateful to Midwestern University to allow me to use this as an elective assignment. Sincerely, Pete Petrillo, APA, MS-III, Maj, SP, AZARNG.”

Just as Student Doctor Petrillo is giving back to the community, he represents the many students we have doing extraordinary acts of kindness and showing great courage in volunteering in many health care settings. They are bringing hope to others while enriching their own lives and experiences. This is the meaning of service and a core value of Midwestern University.

Today, Wednesday, April 22, 2020, the COVID-19 Response Team met to discuss potential reopening strategies when Executive Orders are modified. Extensive discussion revolved around the use of masks in public areas and with patients. Guidelines are being developed for all faculty, staff and students in the days to come. We hope to eliminate the confusion and concern with clear directions, while trying to secure the necessary Personal Protective Equipment for our campuses and clinics.

Announcements:

- I am happy to report we do not have any new cases of COVID-19 on either campus, and the two tests we were monitoring have come back negative. Thank you for continuing to social distance, frequently wash your hands and continuing to follow proper hygiene standards.
- We have no reported COVID-19 cases within our cafeterias, bookstores, cleaning staffs or construction crews on either campus. These groups are checked daily and reported to the COVID-19 Response Team.
- As we prepare for Spring 2020 graduations, it was determined that every graduate would receive five keepsake copies of their College Graduation Program, mailed to the address they are providing Midwestern University for all graduation materials.
- Telehealth has become a well-accepted method of medical consultation over the past weeks. We are setting up a Sub-Committee of the COVID-19 Response Team to explore other opportunities to engage our patient population in telehealth until they can physically return to all of our clinics. We miss our patients! They are educators of our students and play a vital role as members of our community.

I am proud of our students, their commitment to service, and their dedication to the professions they are pursuing. Every student has a story that led to a defining moment when they decided to pursue a health profession. They are the future of health care and someday they may be caring for all of us. Let's continue to support and inspire them, just as all of you support and inspire me.

Be well.

Dr. G.