



As 2019 came to a close, I looked forward to the start of a new decade with great optimism and hope, as I'm sure many of you did. What we all soon came to realize was that our world had been turned upside down in ways we could never imagine. And while that was certainly true for most of us, what is also true is that there is so much to be learned from how we handled the experience.

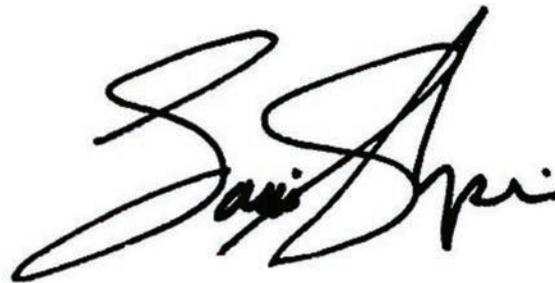
For me, and my organization, COVID-19 had a massive impact. For the last 14 years, I have been the CEO and President of HSS. For those unfamiliar with our organization, HSS is the world's leading academic medical center and system focused on musculoskeletal health. The core of HSS is Hospital for Special Surgery, nationally ranked No. 1 in orthopedics (for the tenth consecutive year) and No. 3 in rheumatology by U.S. News & World Report (2019-2020). As a specialized provider we are normally spared from disaster by the valiant general and community hospitals that shoulder the burden of treating victims of natural and man-made tragedies.

But when COVID-19 hit New York City at full force, we knew we needed to help and become a strategic part of the city's community response. Within days, we transformed into a multispecialty hospital, broadening our emphasis to treat both COVID-19-positive and -negative critical care patients and medical/surgical patients with needs ranging from wound care after a burn injury to management of appendicitis and treatment for substance misuse, all while continuing to take care of those in need of essential orthopedic surgery. Operating rooms and a post-anesthesia care unit were transformed into intensive care units. Tens of thousands of surplus units of personal protective equipment were deployed to other hospitals in need, and thousands of musculoskeletal care providers received training to treat patients with an urgent, deadly illness with equal skill, compassion and dedication.

While it was uncharted territory for us, one thing became very clear. In uncertain times, the one certainty is our steadfast commitment to doing the right thing based on our values, our commitment to helping those in need and our expertise. It was never easy, but it taught us so much about ourselves and what we are capable of. It already has and will continue to make us better. It was hard work with great sadness and amazing victories, but we have learned so much and have acquired knowledge along the way that will be put to great use.

We have now shifted our focus to what we call our "Return to New Normal." We have published a gradual and safe strategy for our resumption of surgery, progressing through three tiers of essential procedures – emergent (which continued during the crisis), urgent (which began early May) and priority – and then to elective procedures. We have formed an interdisciplinary team of senior leaders with specific accountabilities for clinical safety, testing, inpatient care, surgery, outpatient care, and digital care and wellness. We also massively increased our virtual offerings to give patients choice in when and how they receive care, and the response is exceeding all expectations.

I share this with you as one example of a path forward in the face of tragedy. Difficult times never last, but resilient people do. Always remember that, throughout life, we are constantly climbing a mountain. There will be moments that push us to the bottom of the mountain and require us to stand up and climb back up. That is the important part – that we always keep climbing. It is what makes us stronger, no matter how hard the challenges are ahead.



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