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Med students create way to show 'kindness can be just as contagious' as coronavirus

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FSU second-year College of Medicine students Gabby Cintron and Vinita Akula.

Like many others, second-year med students Vinita Akula and Gabby Cintron were overwhelmed and anxious in response to unrelenting and ever-changing news and headlines at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In an effort to offset the anger, sadness and stress felt across the globe, the duo created a website, "[Kindness amid the Coronavirus](http://kindness-amid-coronavirus.com)," to highlight and share positive stories. The website collects and tracks user-submitted stories and displays them in a map.

Submissions have come from near and far.

A school in Panama City, Florida, organized free pizza deliveries to its 50 students; a safari operator in Kenya is spearheading an effort to feed 24,000 families; a 4-year-old in South Africa volunteered to take water to a grandmother across the street; an anonymous donor paid for shoppers' groceries at a Stop & Shop in Provincetown, Rhode Island; and a Ph.D. student at Oxford University is making and distributing hand sanitizer for his community.

"This project has helped tremendously with my anxiety because now I wake up with a plan and goals in mind on how to help, rather than the stressor of not knowing my next steps," said Cintron. "Mental health is a major issue that's intertwined with this pandemic, but we know that a way to combat the stress is by looking at the positive that's going on in the world, which, in turn, can inspire us."

The website went live on April 13 and has over 300 story submissions.

"The inception and creation of the project was primarily driven by my partner, Kevin Dick, a Ph.D. candidate at Carleton University in Canada," said Akula. "He helped on a project called 'Policing the Pandemic' that aimed to visualize COVID-19-related police activity in Canada. From that, we thought of creating a more positive spin on the concept, and instead visualize acts of kindness that were occurring anywhere from our backyard to the other side of the world."

The idea, Akula said, is to mirror a Johns Hopkins University map that visualizes the spread of COVID-19 and instead show how contagious acts of kindness can be.

Second-year med students have been busy studying and preparing for the first part of the United States Medical Licensing Examination known as Step 1 before starting clinical rotations as third-year students. Due to the pandemic, testing sites temporarily closed, then reopened with a great deal of confusion and inaccurate information and unannounced postponements and cancellations, further compounding student stress.

"The most difficult part for me when it comes to this situation is knowing I'm only halfway there," said Cintron. "I know enough about medicine to understand what's happening, but I still have so much to learn before I can be truly helpful in the hospitals."

Creating the website, and finding other outreach opportunities, was a way for Akula and Cintron to have an impact on health-care workers and their communities outside the hospital.

"I think we both knew that Step 1 wasn't going to happen anytime soon for us and we wanted to focus on any way we could help ... we found purpose in this project, with it being a more tangible way we could help our community," said Akula. "We all have had to endure a lot of changes, and none of it has been easy. The best thing for us in an uncertain world is to focus on what we can control, build in self-care, and try to seek a little more positivity."

To see the map and submit a story, visit <http://kindness-amid-coronavirus.com>.

The College of Medicine's Medical Library has also created a page of mental health and wellness resources in response to COVID-19. Visit, <https://med-fsu.libguides.com/mentalhealthforproviders/copingCOVID> to see more.