Dear graduates and special friends of MU Family Medicine,

As Dickens wrote, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity …” Few of us will soon forget the great disruptor, 2020. My heart goes out to those of you who have suffered hardship in health, economic security, social isolation, political divisiveness or racial injustice. Better times lie ahead.

At MU Family Medicine, we remain optimistic and have been ever more focused on how we can adapt to the present and make a better future. Clinically we continue to grow, and will open our fourth Columbia location on Battle Avenue in December. We all became “experts” in telehealth in the course of about three days when it temporarily became our primary paradigm for reaching our patients. A silver lining to the dark pandemic cloud is that we have added tools to provide better care. The collapse of the Boonville hospital has brought us three new clinical faculty and a renewed commitment to our rural mission. Plans are underway to design and build a new primary care practice with high-level urgent care and advanced imaging to try to meet the needs of this rural community. Will new models of care enable us to serve more of rural central Missouri? We aspire to this. And speaking of rural, this year’s third-year medical school class will be the first with the opportunity to apply for our developing Sedalia residency which takes its first two interns in July 2022.

What does a third-year clerkship look like when students are temporarily excluded from the clinical campus? Or PBL when the beautifully designed student labs do not meet the criteria for social distancing? How do we ration PPE and still provide students returning to the clinical campus opportunities to learn and fully experience patient care? How do we teach telehealth as we ourselves learn its advantages and pitfalls? These are problems our faculty have continued to navigate while maintaining our commitment to excellence in medical education.

Transitions are to be expected, but do come with a sense of loss. Anne Fitzsimmons and Jackie Ruplinger have entered the retirement stage of their lives. We thank them for their service. We continue to recruit qualified, dedicated faculty who share our department’s mission, vision and values. We are excited to welcome Gillian Bartlett-Esquilant from McGill University, the president-elect of NAPCRG who will share in our teaching and research missions. We certainly miss our graduating residents and fellows, but we have 14 incredible first-year residents and five new fellows in palliative care, geriatrics and sports medicine.

Not surprisingly, this has been a particularly challenging fiscal year with the decline in state support to the university resulting in a significant decline in funding for education in FCM. The generosity of our family of donors continues to establish and enhance endowments that provide ongoing support for educating students, training residents and fellows, and discovering and sharing knowledge that will improve health. Endowments are particularly meaningful as their funding is dependable and permanent. I would like to call attention to two new endowments, the Armstrong-Carmichael Resident Education Endowment and the Theodore S. Wittels, MD Memorial Fund, together focusing on resident education and well-being. For a description of our endowed funds, or to make an online gift, please visit: fcm.missouri.edu/giving. Your generosity directly supports our mission.

Thank you being there and striving to make your corner of our world a better place, particularly as we in family medicine face unprecedented challenges together in a time that needs us now more than ever.

Best regards,

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