

Revealing and commemorating the faces and warmth of the COVID-19 frontline

Révéler et commémorer les visages et la chaleur de la ligne de front du COVID-19

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Published: Dec 30, 2023; CMEJ 2023, 14(6) Available at <https://doi.org/10.36834/cmej.78208>

Edited by: Marcel D'Eon (editor-in-chief)

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Description

The COVID-19 pandemic made the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) necessary and commonplace to protect healthcare workers (HCWs) and patients alike from the virus. This came at the expense of limiting human interactions and non-verbal communication, which are critical in conveying emotions and building rapport. The lack of visual cues resulted in miscommunications, reduced sense of interpersonal connection, and difficulty building rapport and trust. Ultimately, patients were left feeling increasingly isolated, negatively impacting their recovery.

In April 2020, a group of volunteer students provided a hybrid artistic and medical intervention in the form of smiling headshot portrait badges to be worn over PPE. This helped bridge the human barrier, enhance HCW team dynamics, patient-HCW interactions, and generally improve patient and HCW experiences. This initiative

would expand nationwide to form PPE Portraits Canada, which provided over 3900 portraits to 27 different HCW professions from 26 Canadian cities across five provinces. This is a testimony to the value that healthcare workers, regardless of profession or institution, place on artistic intervention, human connection, and providing warmth and care from the heart. From this initiative is born this mosaic, which consists of over 1100 self-submitted PPE portrait headshots of consenting HCW from across the country featured as pixels coming together to form the image of two healthcare workers proudly wearing their PPE portrait.

This mosaic serves as a reminder for current and future generations of the sacrifices made and scientific lessons learnt during the pandemic, and how we rebuilt the importance of preserving the human element in healthcare. This art piece is intended to create an avenue for the community to remember and heal from these difficult times and foster a sense of unity amongst all frontline workers.

Conflicts of Interest: AAD is founder of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Portraits Canada and LR and CRV are both volunteers and members of the initiative.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank Mary Beth Heffernan and her colleagues for their guidance, all past and present volunteer members of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Canada (PPC), Montréal's The Business Box (<https://www.thebusinessbox.ca/>) for providing PPE portraits at cost, and the frontline workers who contributed to the positive impact of the project and helped others during the COVID-19 pandemic and in particular, Drs. Elizabeth Miazga and Carmen McCaffrey for taking and consenting to use the main image of the mosaic, as well as all healthcare professionals that consented to using their headshots.