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Grey's Anatomy Tackles the COVID-19 Pandemic in Their Latest Season

Ashley Hagar, Staff Reporter

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, many people have turned to TV or streaming services to escape the harsh reality of the virus. However, not all shows are the escape from COVID-19 and its consequences many desired. "Grey's Anatomy" decided to include COVID-19 in its latest season, forcing people to relive the early months of the pandemic through a dramatic televised portrayal of the virus.

When the pandemic first hit the U.S., many entertainment programs were required to end their seasons early as they could not safely or effectively finish filming. Top medical drama, "Grey's Anatomy," was similarly affected, ending its season 16 a few episodes early.

After waiting through the summer filming hiatus and production shutdown, rumors circulated about the show covering COVID-19 in its newest season. After months of waiting, the show was finally able to resume production and air three new episodes in November.

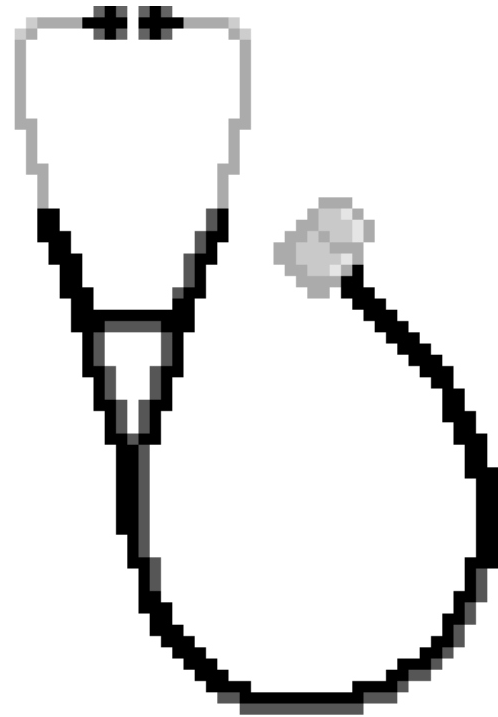
"Grey's Anatomy" has tackled COVID-19 in the last three aired episodes of the new season so far, portraying the social distancing, mask wearing, lockdowns and quarantines that viewers have lived through since March.

Second-year criminal justice major Jennifer Huffman shared her opinion on how "Grey's Anatomy" is highlighting COVID-19 in the show.

"I feel the show did a decent job of covering the reality of the pandemic. They portrayed the social distancing, wearing masks constantly, personal protective equipment (PPE) and keeping COVID-19 patients in quarantine," Huffman said. "One thing I felt the show did a really good job at covering was the emotions of medical workers and how hard it is for them to work during this pandemic and not be able to see their families for weeks on end."

"Grey's Anatomy" shows the harsh lockdowns where doctors and other healthcare professionals were separated from their families and the lack of PPE and other supplies for individuals working in the hospitals. They also covered the spiking COVID-19 cases, resulting in large numbers of deaths. Because the show is covering the sometimes bleak reality of COVID-19, many viewers felt like they were reliving the early months of the pandemic.

Although some find the show currently difficult to watch as they look for a COVID-19 escape, second-year nursing student Desiree Hernandez applauded "Grey's Anatomy's" portrayal of COVID-19 given the circumstances.



Kim Nucum

"Many people are not aware of just how much the pandemic affected hospitals. They did not truly understand the extent to which medical personnel put their life at risk in order to to treat patients with COVID-19" Hernandez said.

Because of her background as a nursing student, Hernandez's studies and conversations with fellow students as well as other nurses during the pandemic have informed her of the realities in hospitals.

"People do not hear their stories. Grey's has always based their show off of personal stories from doctors and nurses and I think it is important for them to continue this."

The show's writers continued their tradition of meeting with real life doctors and nurses this year, talking to those who worked in COVID-19. Through these interactions, writers were able to create a more accurate representation of life through the pandemic.

The show runner, Krist Vernoff, explained in an article on the Shondaland website that even she felt pandemic fatigue and was unsure if the show should cover COVID-19. Despite her concerns, the staff decided it was crucial to cover the most important medical story right now.

Like Vernoff, Huffman also felt pandemic fatigue and was excited to be able to watch one of her favorite shows when it started back up in November. She elaborated on her feeling of pandemic fatigue as a longtime viewer of the show.

"Over these past couple months we have been in constant lockdowns and quarantines, having to wear masks and keep our social distance. This is what our lives look like now, and I wish Grey's Anatomy wasn't talking about the pandemic," Huffman said. "I wish they would've carried on with their normal storylines from previous seasons, because I just need an escape."

In an attempt to move away from a season only concerned with COVID-19, the show used the remaining footage from the end of last season. These scenes would act as flashbacks throughout the episodes to help viewers connect the dots between where they left off and the current storylines.

Although much of the current season relates to COVID-19, the writers have still found ways to make it the drama filled, enticing show everyone knows and loves. Additionally, as a result of still living through the pandemic, Vernoff dedicated this season to all of the workers on the frontline.