

# How medical students are innovating during COVID-19

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The pandemic has been an all-hands-on-deck situation for health care. That has meant channeling the brainpower and energy of those who are just starting their careers in medicine: medical students.

Medical students have contributed in the clinical realm, through volunteer work and through embracing challenges in the digital health realm. That has been evident in the work done by Sling Health, an innovation incubator led by medical students and engineering students. The incubator aims to bridge the divide between clinicians and clinical problems.

A recent episode of the “AMA COVID-19 Update” highlights the way in which student innovation has driven solutions during the pandemic.

## Summer boot camp

For students interested in contributing to innovation during the pandemic—and with most internship and development opportunities limited—Sling Health offered a digital boot camp. Vithika Nag, a graduate student at Duke's Pratt School of Engineering, was among the attendees. “It was very fast paced, but I think the pressure kept us all on a really good timeline, kept us really productive, so it was just a very rewarding experience,” she said. “At the end of every week, we had some design reviews as well that kept us on a really nice milestone, and just checking all the things off our list.”

Here's how medical student entrepreneurs can find out whether their idea has investor appeal.

## Pivoting to address the pandemic

Avik Som, MD, is co-founder of CareSignal Health. Both he and his company are Sling Health alumni. The pandemic forced CareSignal—a digital health company that focuses on deviceless remote patient

monitoring—to adapt on the fly.

“When COVID really struck the United States, we rapidly saw that there was an immediate need among clinicians and hospital systems to get information out there for patients that are potentially experiencing some variation of symptoms,” Dr. Som said. “We generated, effectively, a text messaging support line, something we call the COVID Suite, and that we ended up giving for free to anyone.”

## Getting involved

Some medical students may be hesitant to get involved in innovation during their undergraduate medical training. Dr. Som advises students not to let their place in the pecking order work as a deterrent.

“As a student, it can sometimes be very intimidating to go into clinic and make the claim, or think, that you can make it better,” he said. “The game is: Be proactive and don't ever be intimidated by titles. Don't be intimidated by all of the venture capital firms versus the chief medical officers. I found out as a student that just asking questions and bringing it—people are so excited for the initiative and everybody wants to make it better for the patients.”

The AMA has curated a selection of resources to assist residents, medical students and faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic to help manage the shifting timelines, cancellations and adjustments to testing, rotations and other events at this time.