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Depression Will be the Biggest non-COVID-19 Issue as a Result of the Pandemic

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86% of Doctors Believe Mental Health Issues, Two out of Three Do Not Believe or Are Unsure Whether the U.S. and World Will Return to Normal Following Vaccine Rollout

One year after the first COVID-19 case in the U.S., Sermo surveyed physicians around the world as part of its COVID-19 Real Time Barometer, revealing that 86% of doctors around the world believe that mental health issues and depression will be the biggest non-COVID-19 public health issue after the pandemic. Other areas of concern for the coming year are an increase in violence (34%), increase in spousal or child abuse (27%), increase in suicides (26%) and an increase in opioid abuse (21%).

The effects of COVID-19

Fielded Jan. 8, 2021-Jan. 13, 2021, Study 16 of Sermo's COVID-19 Real Time Barometer included insights from 3,334 physicians across 24 countries. The study also revealed that the majority of physicians (53%) believe the long-term side effects of COVID-19 will be the biggest COVID-related public health issue over the next year. In addition, almost two out of three do not believe or are unsure whether the U.S. and the world will be able to return to normal after the vaccine is rolled out.

The survey also revealed that 63% believe the general public will need an annual vaccine to protect against COVID, while 64% said they are very concerned/concerned that a new COVID virus is on the horizon. Of those who participated in the survey, 53% believe the next pandemic will arrive in 5 or more years.

What have we learned after one year of COVID-19?

Study 16 also asked physicians about the biggest lessons learned during the first year of the pandemic, revealing unified beliefs about:

- Preparedness -- We needed to be more unified and better coordinate federal and global response to the pandemic
- Health System Fragility -- Worldwide, healthcare is seen as an area for cost cutting rather than investment, which has resulted in it being easily susceptible to a health crisis
- Public Education -- We must focus more on educating about the importance of hygiene, prevention and vaccines without devolving into political turmoil

"I have learned resilience," **said Dr. Christopher Michos, emergency medicine physician in Bridgeport, Conn.** "I have witnessed from my colleagues, our nurses, our techs and the truly unsung heroes, the maintenance and cleaning staff of my hospital. Every day, without a second thought, we are out there. It is war and we are the soldiers trying to save our patients, not knowing as we enter the battlefield, if the next exposure will be the bullet that will kill us."

What do we still have to learn after one year of COVID-19?

Physicians surveyed are also concerned about the lessons still to learn about the pandemic, including where the virus originated, how it is transmitted, why certain groups are more at risk of severe infection, what the long-term effects of the virus could be, as well as how long the vaccine will last.

Additional findings from Study 16 include:

- 73% are very concerned/concerned that COVID-19 variants will spread in their region
- 48% are concerned that pulmonary compromise will be a significant COVID-19-related public health issue in the coming year; 27% are concerned about blood clots and other cardiovascular issues, and 22% are concerned about the neurological side effects and multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children and adults (MIS-C, MIS-A)
- 78% are concerned about the long-term impact to the world economy; 50% believe the long-term impact to the healthcare system will be among the largest hidden consequences of the pandemic

"The biggest lesson from the pandemic is to help each other," **said Dr. Lisa Nassif, a pediatric neurologist in Houston, Texas.** "I just opened my private practice during the start of the pandemic. I wasn't able to buy PPE because of the shortage. I had colleagues give me masks and face shields. Once I obtained PPE, I shared what I obtained, as well. Without coming together, we wouldn't make it through this awful time."