

## Uncovering Inequity During Coronavirus By Jeanette Rojas

The last month has been a whirlwind for our MC community. No one has ever been through a pandemic in our lifetime. We are living through uncharted territory with no end in sight. Staff, faculty, and students are having to juggle responsibilities such as homeschooling children, caring for our families, teaching online, facing financial uncertainty, while dealing with emotional and devastating news of friends and family being afflicted with the coronavirus.

At no point in time have we been more aware of the inequities being uncovered in all aspects of life. From students learning to navigate school online with unreliable internet and outdated technology to students unable to acquire a laptop because they have no way to pick it up to the undocumented families that have no benefits, no jobs, and are looking to find food wherever possible. The long lines at food pantries across the nation are a testament to lost jobs or less opportunities to work. If you are low-income, these times are fear-inducing and beyond challenging. Poverty-stricken families are less likely to be insured. If employed, they are more likely to be on the frontlines with higher exposure to the deadly virus.

For the uninsured, hungry, lonely, and/or broke, this is a time when there is less community support because we are required to observe the mandatory statewide shelter-in-place order. The MC community is desperately trying to help students that are facing financial burdens by providing emergency funds. You can help an MC student in need by donating to the emergency fund at <https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/alumni-friends-donors/foundation/donate.html>. Faculty and staff are reaching out to students to find out how to help. At the end of the day, the inequities exist and, now more than ever, they are painfully obvious.

According to data from the Maryland Department of Health, African-Americans are dying at a disproportionate rate from the coronavirus with 8,871 cases and 500 deaths as of May 4, 2020. Below is a breakdown of cases:

Cases and Deaths by Race and Ethnicity (deaths in parenthesis) from the Maryland Department of Health are below. NH = Non-Hispanic

African-American (NH):	8,871 (500)
Asian (NH):	530 (39)
White (NH):	5,698 (486)
Hispanic:	4,625 (78)
Other (NH):	989 (18)
Data not available:	4,749 (61)

“Currently available data...shows troubling disparities and points to a persistent public health challenge that we must address,” Maryland Governor Larry Hogan said in a statement Thursday (April 9, 2020) morning.

In New York, the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the United States, the City Department of Health shows that the zip codes with the most poverty are being hit the hardest, with higher numbers of patients testing positive. The inequity does not stop there. Women and people of color hold a disproportionate share of service industry jobs. The poor have been left jobless and uninsured. Although Maryland’s and New York’s governors are not allowing people to be evicted, they cannot control who is becoming ill with the virus.

Now more than ever, taking a mental health pause is critical. The Student Health and Wellness Center (SHaW) has been hosting mindfulness meetings on Zoom and Dr. Pollard has been giving motivational messages to the MC community, helping us all regroup. We are reaching out to our community, our elders, and friends that may need additional support. As we all face these moments of uncertainty we are being moved to reflect, face our fears, and lend a hand. The Montgomery County Volunteer Center has virtual volunteer opportunities that can be accessed at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/volunteercenter/volunteers/covid19.html>