

POLICY FORUM

Can the Front Line Hold?

Introduction

It wasn't so long ago we sang the praises of unsung heroes, our frontline and essential workers, as they fought a battle against an unseen enemy. That enemy has already killed more Americans than both World Wars combined, plus the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, and the Iranian and Afghan wars.

Their heroic work—who dares deny it?—was stemming the tide in ICUs, hospitals, and care homes where so many paid a price when the enemy broke through to our households, groceries, restaurants, businesses, and places of worship. The death toll slowed, thankfully. But cases are on the rise again, and we are well on our way to adding the number of casualties in our country's most tragic conflict, our Civil War, to the total of those killed by COVID-19.

The bells are tolling, again.

Here at the *North Carolina Medical Journal*, we listened hard to the many contributors to this issue and their many descriptions of frontline and essential work. They described a diverse, dedicated, exhausted, and imperiled workforce that grew wider and wider and more and more encompassing as the front line shifted from health care institutions to neighborhoods and living rooms.

In the American lexicon, the language was very clearly less, "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands," and so much more, "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the General Welfare..." (all caps from the originals).

This issue celebrates our frontline and essential workers who, at great risk to themselves and their families and the people they love, dared to bring Order to chaos; to strive for Unity in strife, Justice in the face of disparity, and Tranquility amidst hate; use clinical science to Defend against disease; and to promote the general Welfare (caps mine).

We owe them much. NCMJ

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