

Introduction to Pandemic Perspectives Exhibit at the Saranac Laboratory Museum

The first summer after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, nearly everyone who visited the Laboratory Museum was asking the staff about Covid-19 and how it compares to tuberculosis, once a widespread epidemic itself. Many visitors were seeing their own experience with Covid-19 reflected in the exhibits talking about patients' experiences with TB.

This exhibit was designed to provide a platform for navigating those discussions with visitors and encourage visitors to share their experiences and thoughts on the pandemic. The exhibit consists of 12 positive and negative words (or perspectives) that we individuals or society may have experienced during Covid-19.

The panel for each word includes a literature quote that relates to the word. Dr. Arden Hegele from Columbia University's Narrative Medicine program consulted on the exhibit and suggested a list of texts from her Epidemic Fictions course. Dr. Hegele's recorded talk explains more about why fiction is a helpful tool for talking about pandemics. Museum staff provided information about TB patient experiences related to that word, but pose a question at the bottom of the panels asking visitors to provide that information for Covid-19.

The goal of this exhibit was to provide a safe and healing space for museum visitors to process their experience with Covid-19, share their personal perspective on the pandemic and talk with staff about the history of pandemics and public health. Visitors could respond to the prompt questions by filling out cards and adding them to a display. We received responses from visitors of all ages and from many different locations. We also had many doctors and nurses write about what it was like for them to take care of Covid-19 patients during the height of the pandemic.

The exhibit is being reinstalled on a larger scale at the museum in January allowing for these original panels to travel to schools and libraries so that students like you can share your pandemic perspective.

-Mahala Nyberg, Public Programs Coordinator, Historic Saranac Lake.