As a hospitalist at SHC-VC Dr. Thomas Lew has been on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis for the last year and a half. Seeing otherwise healthy patients rapidly decompensate at the beginning of the pandemic, he felt obligated to tell people what he was experiencing inside the hospital. He has since published more than 25 articles in USA Today and other local and national news outlets that provide readers with a unique window on the pandemic usually unseen by those outside the walls of the hospital. Stirring and personal, his writing addresses topics from COVID vaccine hesitancy to the health effects of climate change – all inspired by his patient care encounters. Passionate about patient care, Dr. Lew views his writing as an extension of his clinical work. Hearing from readers that his words helped them convince a loved one to get vaccinated, it is clear his impact has been great both within SHC-VC and beyond its doors.

During the COVID-19 pandemic you’ve penned more than 25 articles as a physician columnist for USA Today in addition to your clinical duties at SHC-VC. What inspired you to start writing?

At the beginning of the pandemic we began seeing healthy patients decompensate incredibly rapidly. These experiences opened my eyes to how serious and deadly the virus could be, and I felt obligated to tell people what I was seeing. I connected with the Stanford Medicine communications team, and they encouraged me to share my story with USA Today and other national outlets. I have
always enjoyed writing, and I appreciate the opportunity to extend the reach of my impact beyond the walls of our hospital.

As physicians we each have the privilege of seeing health and humanity in a unique light through our patient interactions. I’m lucky enough to be able to share mine with folks across the county but know there are so many more physician perspectives to share. Everyone on our medical staff has something important to offer, and I hope more colleagues will have the opportunity to share their stories too.

**What has been your biggest challenge this year?**

This year has been so unprecedented. There’s a lot of mental exhaustion. We’re doing so much work to try to save people and make their lives better, and sometimes our advice is not getting through. We’ve been warning people for months and months about the dangers of COVID and how to protect yourself and your loved ones by getting vaccinated. As physicians, we try to empathize, but we still feel the exhaustion. As a writer, I receive hate mail and have trolls making negative comments on my columns. But hearing from readers who’ve said my articles have helped convince a loved one to get vaccinated grounds me in the importance of our work and is very rewarding.

**What are you most proud of?**

Working at Stanford Health Care - VC has been a dream job. We have the opportunity to extend Stanford’s reach out into the East Bay community and wider Bay Area. I’m passionate about putting my Stanford training to use to help patients in the East Bay, and I’m proud to support Stanford Medicine’s mission to improve human health with both my writing and clinical work.

**Why do you love working at Stanford?**

I love this place. I went to undergrad and residency here, but it’s the people at Stanford Medicine that keep me here. My colleagues and staff are wonderful – smart, generous, kind and talented. I’m grateful to be part of the Stanford team and the diverse and welcoming Bay Area community.