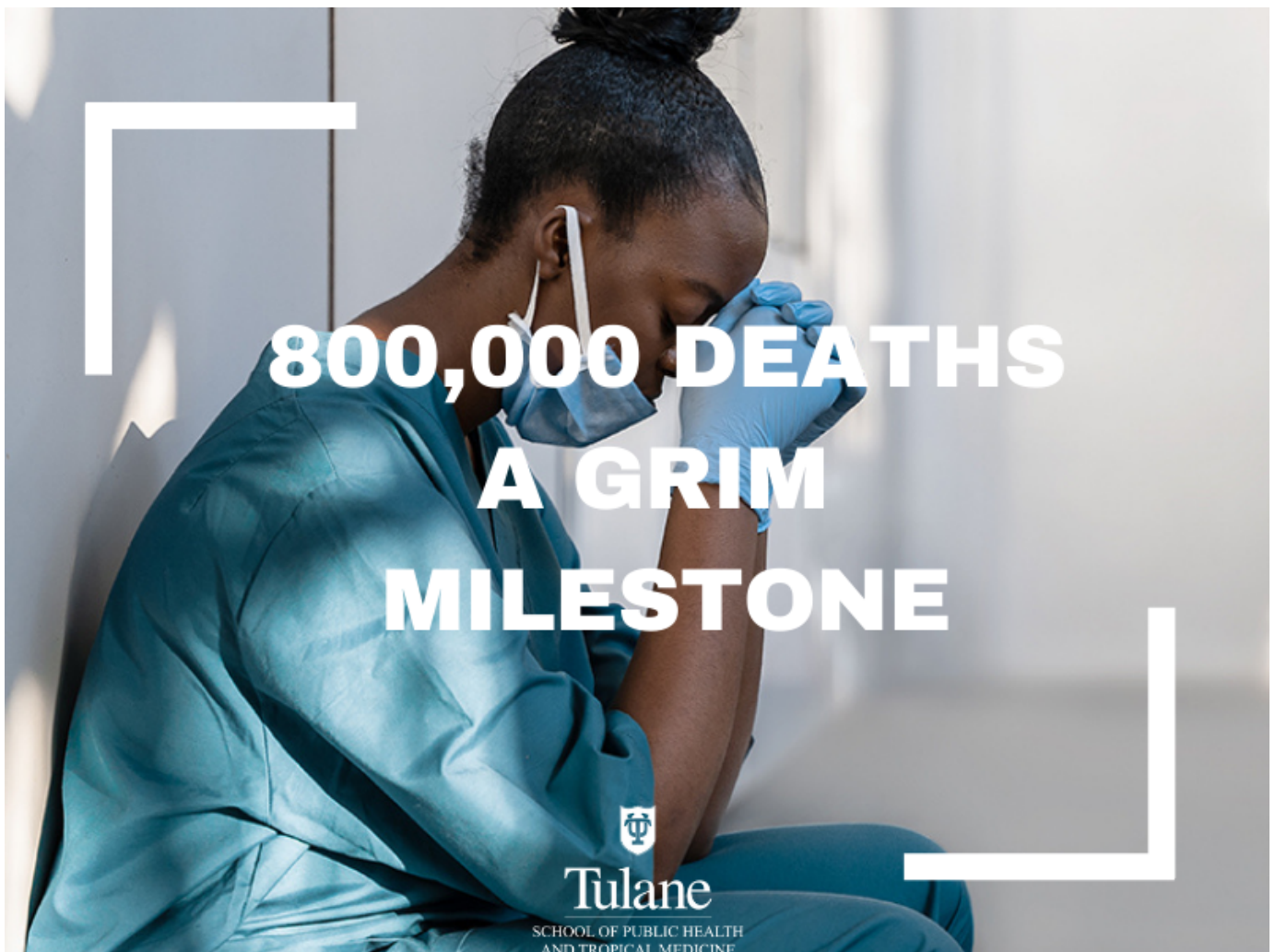


Milestone demonstrates that the fight is not over

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The U.S. has passed a grim milestone: 800,000 deaths from COVID-19.

So far, I've seen this number compared to the populations of both San Francisco and South Dakota, but for our community, that represents more than twice that of the

current population of New Orleans.

Imagine that, the entire population of this city lost to a pandemic not once, but twice.

I'm not going to say that these deaths were entirely preventable, but we know that the unvaccinated face a much greater risk of death than those who have been vaccinated.

Estimates point to about 60% of Americans are vaccinated, leaving 40% at greater risk of death from the pandemic. And now we have the Omicron variant beginning its spread across the U.S.

While early reports suggest that Omicron causes less severe symptoms, it appears at the same time to be more contagious. While that means that any one person might not get severe symptoms, greater numbers could become ill and potentially die from the disease.

It's not a good situation to be in.

In one way or another, all public health professionals have been fighting the spread of this virus for going on two years. We're all tired of the politicization of COVID, the pleas asking individuals to get vaccinated and vaccinate their children, and the arguments over masking. We're even tired of masking ourselves, but we know that it's the right thing to do.

It's clear that the fight isn't over. We owe it to the 800,000 lives lost that we will continue to share data, be a good example, and repeat what we know will save more lives:

Mask up, and get vaccinated.