

Time for Selfish Pursuit of Well-Being and Connection

As I sit to write this New Year's message, I am painfully aware of how many of us in health care have been pushed to our physical and emotional breaking points by the sustained pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic. The words "Happy New Year" ring somewhat hollow, while our hospitals and facilities are filled with the most recent surge in COVID-19 cases, systemwide staffing shortages continue to force us to reduce hours and close beds and patient pandemic fatigue is causing unnecessary hostility and distrust towards our health care community. Yet, does the collective catharsis of the rapidly evolving global health care crisis provide clinicians with a larger opportunity? An opportunity to prioritize well-being as a path to better health overall?

U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy says, "the truth is that if we can't fully optimize our well-being, we can't understand how to build a foundation for good health. If we don't understand the interplay between our mental health, our physical health and our spiritual health." Many of us treat specific physical and mental conditions more narrowly, but increasing evidence shows that focusing on emotional well-being can have an overall impact on one's length and quality of life. For example, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), having a sense of purpose in life is shown to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke.

The NIH is currently funding [five studies](#) regarding the science of emotional well-being and how through the application of its concepts people can live and feel better and have healthier outcomes. Dr. Helene Langevin, NCCIH director, says "Sustained well-being benefits the whole person, helping individuals manage stress and anxiety over the long term." By redefining public health to include well-being as a marker, could we build more resilience in ourselves and our communities to better meet the challenges of life and the pandemic?

In this new year, I would encourage all of us to foster our own well-being with these simple steps:

First, realize you can't be everything to everyone. Generally, as health care professionals, people turn to us for answers. Being trained to address illness and disease, many of us feel it is our duty to know the answers. But, even for the best of us the stress of the prolonged crisis has produced an overall exhaustion, which makes filtering through the chaos of information increasingly difficult. We need to recognize and address our own exhaustion and selfishly pursue well-being in order to best meet our patient's needs. [Click here for VMS' Clinician Wellness Resources.](#)

Second, cultivate opportunities for deep connection by truly being present. Back to the dizzying array of information, it can be very difficult to settle in and just listen to our patients, our colleagues and even our loved ones, amidst the push to be current on the latest guidance. Virtual appointments, EMRs and even our own phones can provide consistent technological distractions in our practice yet, we know we can't actually multitask very well. Dividing our attention usually doesn't help us or our patients. By fully focusing our attention on the people around us, we open up the opportunity for real connection which all of us so desperately need right now.

Third, take action to improve Vermont's practice environment. Evidence shows in the face of adversities, collective action produces a greater sense of well-being vs. doing nothing or doing it alone. The VMS policy team is about to embark on the 2022 legislative session and will be advocating on policies to provide COVID-19 flexibilities, prioritize public health, address pediatric mental health needs and reduce administrative burden. [Click here for VMS' 2022 Policy Priorities](#). Gain fulfillment and increased well-being through working together with your colleagues to urge lawmakers to support policies like increased Medicaid reimbursement rates, protecting reproductive rights through a constitutional amendment and adequate investment in youth cannabis prevention. [Click here to learn more about you can participate in VMS advocacy](#) and make a difference in Vermont's health care practice environment!

Happy New Year! Take care of yourself, so you can take care of others.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simi Ravven', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Simi Ravven