REFLECTION ON COMPASSION

It seems apropos during the holiday season to offer a few thoughts about compassion. Most of us who choose to enter medicine do so at least in part out of compassion for others; we willingly make personal sacrifices in order to better serve our patients, and we cultivate this virtue in ourselves and our colleagues.

But, as with all virtues, proportionality and context are important. There is increasing evidence that our compassion for others must be balanced with self-compassion for optimal results. This doesn’t mean less compassion for others, but it does mean treating ourselves more kindly as well. It means accepting our own human limitations, and treating our own professional errors and failures (we all have them!) as opportunities for self-improvement and growth rather than as evidence of inadequacy or worthlessness. And it means realizing that taking proper care of ourselves is important - in part - because it enables us to care better for our patients.

Our UHA data show that self-compassion in one year’s survey has a significant protective effect against burnout in the subsequent year, while also increasing the odds for professional fulfillment. This is an individual trait but is highly influenced by the cultural environment. Similarly, every Stanford medical staff wellness survey has demonstrated an association between self-compassion and wellness indicators, including lower burnout.

This holiday season, my wish for all of us at Stanford is that we resolve to build a stronger culture of compassion – for patients, for colleagues and for ourselves – and for each of us to look inward to contemplate whether, by being maybe just a little less hard on ourselves, we can actually be happier and more professionally fulfilled while also doing better for our patients and our colleagues.

Happy Holidays!

Calendar:
See WellMD Calendar for more events & classes, or CME wellness courses

12/8 Holiday Musicale
12/10 Yoga as a Treatment for Chronic Health Conditions
12/11 Om Under the Dome
12/11 Women Faculty Networking Holiday Reception
12/14 Annual Messiah Sing/Play Along
12/16 Holiday Organ Recital

News and Articles of Interest:
Compassion/Mindfulness
- Anonymous test for self-compassion
- Self-compassion: The Best Medicine
- 6 Habits of Highly Compassionate People
- 5 Easy Ways to Bring Mindfulness to Work

Humanities
- Dr. Daniel Mason on The Winter Soldier
- Frankenstein @200 wrap-up & videos

Resources
- New Stanford Medicine Connected has a Calendar section - submit your events!
- New group for medical students with Chronic Illness and Disability
- Collaboration Tools – Slack, Google Drive, Zoom and Jaber

Travel
- Stanford International Travel Policy Help
- Medical Emergencies on Commercial Flights – new online course

Research:

In 41 healthy adults, and controlling for self-esteem, depressive symptoms, age, gender, ethnicity, BMI and distress, the trait of self-compassion was negatively associated with an inflammatory response to a repeated laboratory-based psychosocial stressor. “Self-compassion may serve as a protective factor against stress-induced inflammation and inflammation-related disease.”