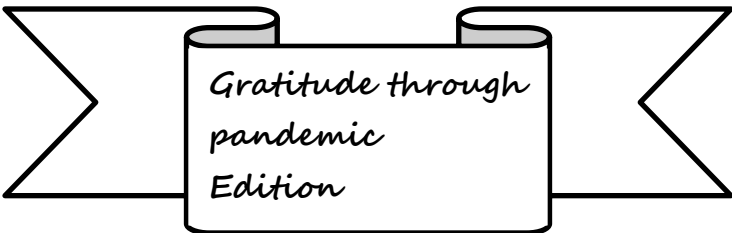


Caroline Giroux, MD
Editor



*Gratitude through
pandemic
Edition*



Dear wise neighbor

I am asking you, with deep sincerity, “how are you, right at this minute?”

“The peephole through which I intake the present and future feels a little warped. I'd already been trying to savor the last of my time home in Sacramento to a much fuller effect in the second half of this academic year. Now the goodbye process feels so much more accelerated, but the future feels farther away as my initial fancies & high expectations for life in my new city look certain to be altered.”

-Dr. Benjamin Liu,
4th-year resident

Existential angst, “jamais-vu” sensation, panic etc. We are in fight, flight or freeze mode. How can we effectively respond to this challenge posed to the whole of

humanity? More than ever, we need to connect to get through this. Yet, we must think fast as we do so in a way that respects physical social distancing.

I find especially ironic that this brand new leaflet was born around the time COVID-19 was making its way to our continent... In this strange and scary time of physical distancing, the need for neighbors seems so acute. Some universals of this crisis seem to be the grief processes on an almost daily basis, as some of our plans, dreams, routines, and now individual freedoms for the greater good are stripped away from us. But I hope to provide some respite from the overwhelming emotions through this uplifting edition full of your supervisors’ precious advice and wisdom.

The power of gratitude

The author of a book I am really enjoying on a daily basis, *Simple Abundance* (by Sarah Ban Breathnach) managed to convince me to start a gratitude journal. I started it on February, a little bit before everything started to spiral down. I even sometimes feel like a fraud listing my blessings at the end of the day, the true joys seeming so dissonant with the progressive anhedonia, loss of appetite, insomnia and roller-coaster moods that have been plaguing me. But at some point I started noticing something interesting, only after a few weeks: I actually *seek* things to be thankful for, so I have something to write! And this approach reminds me of another book I highly recommend if you want some inspiration

(and convincing) to get started with this: The Sweetness of Life, by Francoise Heritier.



Encouraging messages and some resources from faculty

Your supervisors think and care about you!

“My mantra during this time is “one day at a time”. Also, please know that you can always reach out to me for support.”

-Dr Rachel Robitz

“Register what you feel and know that someone out there is probably feeling similarly. You are not alone. Expect your emotional state to change frequently as we all are adjusting to new experiences we haven't faced before. That is OK, it will get better. Be kind to yourself, notice when you need recharge and refocus, and when you need help. Even if it doesn't seem like it will help, be open to virtual social connections in your personal life where you can. Even if it doesn't seem like it will help, be open to trying self soothing things like a bubble bath or walk in wild flowers. When you feel a little better, reach out to those on the front lines who need us.”

-Dr Danielle Alexander

“I always say "one foot in front of the other" "this too shall pass" and "keep on going!" Also, headspace is free for anyone with an NPI

number through the end of the year, and this blog:

<https://www.mindfullivingcounselingservices.com/blog/2020/3/13/coping-with-coronavirus-anxiety>”

-Dr Melissa Hopkins

“You are the first residents EVER to go through something like this, and you are doing an incredible job!! We're here with you, we're going to figure this out together, and we're all going to be better psychiatrists on the other end of this. And for the inevitable times when we're feeling alone, terrified, overwhelmed, and need a break...I recommend the Switched on Pop podcast if you're a music lover. Hang in there, everyone!”

-Dr Sara Baumann

“Love and team based messages and reading some Rumi are my favorites these days.”

-Dr Murat Pakyurek

“It is normal to feel anxious and scared in a situation such as this. We must also remember to use the best evidence available to us to protect ourselves while simultaneously doing our very best to serve our patients. We chose this profession because we wanted to help those in need. Our patients at MHTC are some of the most vulnerable and overlooked within our society, and they are particularly at risk of being devalued and dehumanized in times of crisis and resource scarcity.

We are grateful for the excellent care you provide every day to our patients. As residents, you are essential partners with us as we move forward as health care providers during what will be a difficult period for our health care systems,

communities, nation and the world at large. We will all have to rely on and support each other in the days ahead. Please let us know if you have additional questions or concerns.”

- Dr Laura Kenkel

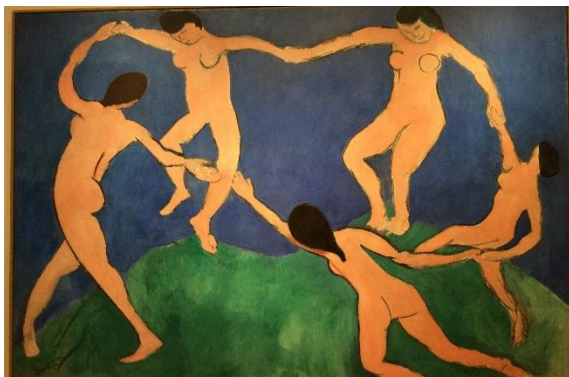
“Develop your ability to discern when it is time to be on *doing* mode and when it is necessary to simply *be* or *feel*. Remain fully present, take notes: this is history unfolding before your very eyes. Think about how you will tell the tale to your grandchildren one day...”

-Dr Caroline Giroux

We are strong, our community is united and we will overcome whatever is thrown at us. Of this I am certain. This time will pass.

Please remember. Gratitude helps us all. So do thank all our colleagues for the work they do.”

-Dr Peter Yellowlees



Gratitude in psychotherapy

Gratitude is one of life’s most vitalizing ingredients¹. It can even lower blood pressure, improve immune function (very much needed these days ☺), promote general wellbeing and acts of generosity. It also reduces the risk for depression, anxiety and substance abuse disorders. Keeping a gratitude journal can even improve sleep.

Gratitude can stem from the acceptance of a stranger’s kindness, a sense of awe for the majesty of nature, the recognition of the gifts in one’s own life. In sum, it can enhance nearly all spheres of human experience. Beyond its ability to create tangible benefits, we might cherish simply feeling grateful for its own sake (what I would summarize as “meta-gratitude”). A universal human attribute, gratitude is also a mindfulness quality that helps regulate relationships. Accepting gifts from patients can have a powerful effect on the patient’s self-esteem. Gratitude can be healing; it can be utilized to facilitate the closure of past wounds and through contrast, as painfulness is often followed by the redemption of healing. Especially these days, some blessings are not known until they are lost (face-to-face interactions, going to a café, hugs, etc).

Source:

1.Emmons RA, Stern R. Gratitude as a psychotherapeutic intervention. *Journal of clinical psychology*. 2013 Aug;69(8):846-55.

The positive glossary: *Self-efficacy*

Self-efficacy is the belief that one is capable of executing the courses of action required to manage unpredictable or challenging situations¹. The concept is recognized as a robust predictor of health behavioral change and maintenance, as efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, and motivate themselves to act. These cognitive self-evaluations influence all manner of human experience, including the goals for which people strive, the amount of energy expended toward goal achievement, and

likelihood of attaining particular levels of behavioral performance². For instance, for me who is very near technological illiteracy, when I downloaded a zoom App on my phone, I felt self-efficacious and it gave me a boost of positivity after a hectic day; another example is using one's creativity to invent new recipes if food stores get less varied and depleted. Once we are able to solve a problem, it creates a positive feedback loop that activates self-confidence and makes us more and more effective. I hope that you can practice and harness the self-efficacy in you through those surreal times!

Source:

1. Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: Freeman

2. <https://www.apa.org/pi/aids/resources/education/self-efficacy>



A philosophical bubble in time

Time to look at this multilayered COVID-19 problem through another lens:

“...the coronavirus is a quantum phenomenon, in that it contains within itself both death-creating poison as well as its own medicine. Encoded in the virus is its own vaccine - as interdependently connected cells in a greater living organism, each of us is being demanded by the coronavirus to realize how we can synergistically co-operate together so as to resist and overcome its invasion. Though itself continually mutating, the coronavirus is, when push comes to shove, forcing us to mutate—to expand our consciousness—or else! As such, the coronavirus is a powerful catalyst for human evolution. How this pandemic will ultimately manifest depends upon—in true quantum style, *potentially*—whether or not we recognize what it is revealing to us about ourselves.”

Source (thank you Ben Liu for sharing this!):

https://www.awakeninthedream.com/articles/the-coronavirus-contains-its-own-medicine?fbclid=IwAR0i3diXUwzr7owX3HV7VkmX4rakJZwORFp0ElAbvzCBdeLRo4Dyctf9x30&utm_source=Good+Grief+Network&utm_campaign=807393b53e-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_20_05_56&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_ebe5f09a2f-807393b53e-81344789&mc_cid=807393b53e&mc_eid=3a60badf40

