A message from Dr. Peter Yellowlees, Chief Wellness Officer

Remembrance and hope

The version of “Good Stuff” sent to all physicians on Feb. 2 led to many requests for it to be widely distributed to all staff. You can read it below. With this in mind, I asked Julie Schweitzer PhD, and Nate Kuppermann MD to write an introductory piece to put my original thoughts in context.

Here is what they wrote. Lest we forget.

January 27th marked Holocaust Memorial Day, the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest World War II Nazi death camp. We observed this day to remember lives lost to racism, hate, and intolerance, to prevent future persecution and genocide.

By the end of World War II, the Nazi regime and collaborators had murdered six million Jews, almost two out of every three European Jews and 1/3 of the global Jewish population. For survivors, their lives were full of emotional and physical pain. Many of our Jewish UC Davis team members lost family during the Holocaust, within the lifetimes of our parents and grandparents. Other groups targeted by the Nazis included the Romani people, people of Slavic origins, persons with disabilities and mental health issues, LGBTQ+, Black persons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others.

Anti-Semitism (hostility or discrimination against Jews) did not end with the end of the Holocaust. Recently, we have seen deadly shootings at Jewish places of worship and anti-
Semitic symbols displayed in public rallies on both coasts. Let us honor those lost by listening to one another, learning about one another’s cultures and challenging intolerance in all of its forms, in order to prevent future crimes against humanity. For more information check out the excellent resources at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

And here is the “Good Stuff” originally sent to all physicians on Feb. 2, with the title “Our feelings are normal”:

“I don’t think of all the misery, but of the beauty that still remains.” –Anne Frank

As many of you know it was Holocaust Remembrance Day last Wednesday, Jan. 27. Now that our news reports are showing more of us getting vaccinated and beginning to feel more hopeful, I thought this quote from Anne Frank was very appropriate. Reading Anne Frank’s story, and visiting the home where she was trapped in Amsterdam many years ago, made strong impressions on me, as they have on many.

Anne wrote down her thoughts and feelings over a two-year period from age 13 to 15 and her diary has been published in 65 languages. Many of us read Anne’s diary in school as children still do today. Her ability to find hope in such a difficult time is inspirational. She wrote about one of the most horrific periods in history, but she was able to tell us her personal story in a timeless way. She makes an important point that hope is essential to coping despite adversity – like our current pandemic.

It’s important to deal with the difficulties we continue to face. The pandemic has gone on a long time and we have a right to feel exhausted. However, it may be helpful to focus on the beauty that still occurs in our lives. As I have been walking our two dogs each morning the past few weeks, I have noticed new buds on all the trees. I’m not sure I paid much attention to tree buds before, but it somehow makes me hopeful about the spring that is just around the corner. These morning walks used to be a chore for me, but by refocusing on the beauty of nature, they have become something I really look forward to these days.

I think the vaccines’ arrival is also helping people to feel more hopeful about the future. Certainly I am. We all look forward to the day that there are enough for everyone to become vaccinated. At UC Davis Health we have a very high level of vaccination and are achieving herd immunity in our own workplace bubble. After almost a year dealing with COVID-19 it is good to be hopeful, despite the extra uncertainty, fear, inconvenience and loss of control that have entered our lives through the pandemic.

It may also help to revisit the normal emotional responses that occur following any disaster, to remind us of why we feel as we do at this time. Many of you will have seen a variation of the chart below:
The chart describes the typical pattern of the emotional responses seen in most people following major disasters like the pandemic, from lows to highs, over the first 18 months or so. It describes six phases: Pre-disaster, Impact, Heroic, Honeymoon, Disillusionment and Reconstruction. As you can see, we are now at the Disillusionment phase, trying to hope for a new beginning with vaccinations and continuing public health measures, but not yet there.

So what are the normal emotional reactions that most of us have during this Disillusionment phase, when we are also just starting to get hopeful? That I have, and that many of you have. That are normal responses that we have to learn to manage, and which occur even in this setting of greater hope.

Cynicism, frustration, fatigue, a sense of loss, exhaustion.

These may be accompanied by feelings of disappointment, anger, resentment and bitterness.

Our emotional responses are driven by our understanding of the reality of our losses and the limits of available assistance. And they may be associated with a loss of “shared community” as we tend to concentrate on protecting our individual lives, rather than pulling together. This is where our psychological projection onto others – blaming others – comes in.

So let’s focus on solutions for the normal emotional responses mentioned above, as we move through this phase and manage them as effectively as possible. Remember, it is important to take care of yourself with healthy nutrition, enough sleep and regular exercise. There are a large numbers of resources available here and in many past issues of the “Good Stuff” newsletter, which include tips and strategies.
Here are some of my core coping suggestions for now:

1. Remember that your current mixed emotional responses of hope and irritation are likely normal and shared by many others – they will pass.
2. We are resilient. Use the coping strategies that you know from experience help you most – exercise, hobbies, chocolates, or socializing at a distance.
3. Don’t project distress or anger onto others. If you find yourself getting angry or frustrated with someone, take a short time out. Don’t send the angry email. Don’t “reply to all” in haste. If you are feeling hostile in a group setting, keep quiet and discuss your concerns privately later. Try to collaborate. Others may feel the same as you.
4. Constantly put yourself in the shoes of others and practice gratitude – remember the equation: “Empathy plus action = compassion.”

“I’ve found that there is always some beauty left...in nature, sunshine, freedom, in yourself.” –Anne Frank, 1940

T6 Med Surgery
“You guys have always given me great care. And for that I am very thankful. I hate going to the hospital but because of the care I receive they make it so much better being there.”

T8 Transplant/Special Care
“All medical staff that treated or assisted me were very knowledgeable, professional, and friendly!”

Vascular Center Clinic
“Excellent team – communicative with me and each other. Felt I was in the care of competent professionals who also had terrific personalities.”

UC Davis Medical Group Campus Commons Clinic
“I have always been pleased with the responsiveness of all of the staff when I call or have an appointment. I have been a patient of UC Davis Medical Group for over 20 years and they
have always been great.”

**Children’s Surgery Center**

“From the moment we were greeted by the receptionist, to the post op visit with doctor. We could not have been treated any better. Everyone was caring, professional and truly informative. My husband & I are happy with the way it all turned out. Thank you to everyone.”