A message from Dr. Peter Yellowlees, Chief Wellness Officer

How to help your loved ones and your colleagues: Psychological first aid – principles and practice

Thank you to all staff for all that you are doing for our patients, for our community and for your family and friends.

The anxiety which affects all of us and our families during this pandemic is for most a normal reaction to an abnormal time. Just as the pandemic will pass, so will our anxiety. Both are “infectious,” and both will eventually resolve. But right now, it is clear that the levels of anxiety and uncertainty are for some people outside the usual realm of “normal” and that many of us are becoming emotionally fatigued, especially those in direct contact with potentially infected patients.

In what is now a regular weekly Zoom meeting of the UCD Departmental Well-being Champions and the Residents Well-being Committee, we had a discussion about evidence-based approaches to helping and supporting each other. The most commonly used method involves the principles and skills of “psychological first aid” that we teach our first responders, who then use them while intervening in disaster situations. These are simple and straightforward, and we should all know about them so that we can be a helpful “first responder” for our colleagues, friends, and of course our spouse, partner or family member.

The practice of psychological first aid comprises listening, validating, helping, supporting and referring if necessary. So, what should you do if someone is distressed?

1. Stay calm yourself, and let the individual know you are there for them.
2. Be fully present and attentive. Focus on the person talking, and on what they are saying. Do not be distracted, and do not try to immediately suggest interventions. Listen.
3. Recognize their basic needs. Concern about safety, resources, loved ones, pets. And respond with specific and concrete plans.
4. Validate and match their feelings and thoughts. People typically do not want to hear about your solutions. They just want to be heard. Responding to emotions with intellectual and objective comments is usually not helpful.
5. Provide accurate and timely information if relevant but avoid overdoing it. You are not a therapist; you are a listener and helper.
6. Reinforce your colleagues' strengths and positive coping strategies. Ask what they have done in the past that has helped and encourage them to do this again. What works for them is more important than what you might think should work in theory.
7. Connect them with support systems of relevance to them, families, friends and colleagues, and check in with them afterwards to make sure they are OK.
8. Finally, provide education about stress responses and resources for physical and mental health as referenced at the bottom of this message, and encourage them to seek help if you think this is necessary.

Here is a really nice, simple fact sheet that you can download and print out if you want more details.

We are going to get through this difficult time together. Let’s use our skills and knowledge to help ourselves communicate well, and if necessary, to be psychological first responders for our colleagues, our loved ones, our families and our friends, and to allow us to accept their help in return.

Pediatric Infectious Disease Glassrock
"We felt like we were in the most capable hands. During my child's illness, which was the most awful time, everything was explained to me. The office staff are great too. Calls are returned promptly, help is given and questions are answered."

D10 PICU
"I as a parent felt very safe to have my child at UC Davis Medical. My experience was great!!!"

D6 Cardiology
"My discharge nurse was very quick and took care to make sure I had all my questions
answered."

**UC Davis Medical Group Folsom GI Procedure**
"The anesthesiologist was outstanding. The nurses were the best I have had."

**Emergency Pavilion**
"Thank you for your wonderful care & concern regarding my ER visit, you all were outstanding."