A message from Dr. Peter Yellowlees, Chief Wellness Officer

Crisis Communication - how we can connect effectively within virtual/hybrid teams

Thank you to everyone in this time of crisis.

Health care is a team sport. Especially at a time of crisis. Especially now, more than ever. At a time that we are separated from our usual team members in this current crisis it is essential that we communicate with each other well, frequently, and consistently. And that we use multiple approaches and styles of communication, all with the dual roles of caring for our patients and ensuring our own continuing well-being. After all, as we all know, if we do not protect ourselves appropriately, we won’t have the chance of helping our patients.

Teamwork among virtual or hybrid (online and in-person) teams is different from in-person teams, but certainly doable. At present there are some obvious extra barriers to team communication. These include, among others: where we are physically based (home or at work), how we are dressed (masked and in PPE or not), what our roles are (normal or repurposed), how we are communicating (verbal, email, text, phone or video) and how we are coping (over-anxious or not.) Despite these changes, some core principles of how to relate in virtual or hybrid teams are important, and we should hold onto them as we move through this crisis.

So, what are “best practices” for virtual/hybrid teams? Many have been described, and I have distilled these into the following suggestions:
1. Get the team together and reconnect regularly. If you can do this in-person, sometimes that is ideal because it is usually easier to foster trust and build relationships more rapidly. But in our situation, mixed meetings, with some people in-person and some online by video if possible, are likely best.

2. Start each team meeting with a quick “check-in” from every member, and with a review of something positive that is happening to encourage everyone. Rewards, congratulations, compliments and fun stories are great.

3. Clarify all tasks and processes, not just goals and roles and responsibilities, and document these regularly.

4. Use the best technologies available that include everyone. In our setting, Zoom is often ideal in that it allows video and phone, as well as in-person connections.

5. Keep up a work rhythm with regular routines, expectations and accountabilities so that no one is excluded.

6. Foster shared leadership, if possible, by promoting leadership opportunities across the team, while still ensuring a clear decision-making process.

7. Make sure there are still 1:1, or subgroup meetings, as necessary. Not everything has to go through the whole team.

8. Communicate and if necessary, over-communicate, with everyone.

We are all here for the long run as we get through this pandemic and its aftermath. The more we can work in teams and value and respect the other team members, the better it will be for all of us, for our patients and for our community. So, let’s not let the barriers to team communication get in the way of our commitment to excellence.

At UC Davis we have lots of highly effective teams, none more so than in the ED. So here are some photos of our ED team. Enjoy....
Davis 6 Cardiology
"They were always very polite, explaining everything in detail."

UC Davis Medical Group Natomas Family Practice
"This was my first visit with UCD Health and I am looking forward to continued service."

Emergency Pavilion
"I would definitely tell everyone about my visit. #1. WONDERFUL."

T3 Women's Health Pavilion
"Thank you to all the staff of the hospital. Everyone treated us with respect and kindness."

Ortho Clinic ACC
"Excellent experience, I feel that overall there is a concern by all members of this team to make sure my physical outcome is the best it can be."