A message from Dr. Peter Yellowlees, Chief Wellness Officer

Moving forward along the Pandemic Curve

“It is often in the darkest skies that we see the brightest stars.”
Richard Evans

It’s been tough to have our world turned upside down. Despite the significant changes in our daily lives it is also worth thinking about the many unexpected and welcomed positive outcomes. This does not mean we forget about the loss of lives and suffering of so many but rather that we acknowledge that we have also seen many good things come out of this crisis.

There are many examples of the kindness to strangers brought out by COVID, including Chef José Andrés feeding millions of the hungry, massive numbers of volunteers for Meals on Wheels, and random acts of kindness among friends and neighbors. People who used to commonly avoid eye contact now more often wave as we pass by. Many of us have been enjoying more contact with friends and family via Zooming. Many people who had not been exercising daily are now on bikes or walking as part of their daily routine.

Over the next two weeks, a number of UC Davis Health staff will return to a more normal form of work. As we do so, we all have to be thoughtful and appreciative of our individual efforts over the past two months and be aware that these have been very variable. Some clinicians and other staff have been in direct contact with COVID positive patients which likely added to the associated personal fear and concern of infecting friends and families. Others have been working without direct contact with COVID patients but have also been putting in long hours. Many other staff have been working full-time – from home and doing an excellent job despite
such a sudden change in how they work while trying to balance work and home life. Some people are feeling a little worn down whereas others may be raring to go. And most are still uncertain and at least somewhat afraid of what the future might bring, as we all process our individual experiences of this COVID crisis.

The bottom line is that we have all had differing individual experiences, and we should all be aware of that as we join our colleagues at work in the “new normal” UC Davis Health. Most importantly through our efforts as a community we have all been responsible for the successful flattening of the COVID infection curve in our region, and in saving lives.

As we move forward, I would like to introduce you to another COVID curve, the emotional response curve to the pandemic stressors as described in JAMA a few weeks ago by Tait Shanafelt MD and Jonathan Ripp MD.

**The Pandemic Curve and Associated Stressors**

Greatest Stressors

1) Fear for Basic Needs
   - What will I eat?
   - How will I be kept safe?
   - Who will care for my children?
   - How will I get to and from work?

2) Uncertainty
   - How long will this workload continue?
   - Will I be redeployed?
   - Am I doing enough?

3) Processing Experiences
   - Grief and loss
   - PTSD or PT Growth
   - Catching my breath and time to reflect

Thankfully we are now on the downward part of the curve, when COVID cases are reduced. I am sure that many of you can recognize your own emotions over the past three months, with a fear for basic needs, being overtaken by uncertainty, which gradually reduces as we start processing our experiences. It is important to talk about your experiences. Tell your colleagues and your friends what you “did during the time of COVID” and compare your experiences, your successes, your difficulties, and in particular your stories. Processing your thoughts and feelings is important, so sit down with your colleagues and friends and compare notes. You will help yourself, and you will help them.

All of this is important to do because you have without doubt heard in the media the prediction that many people will have increased mental health needs over the next few months. While I think this is likely to be true, I also think a lot of individual distress can be avoided if we allow ourselves to process what has happened as we continue to move forward. We all do this differently and some people are comfortable talking openly about difficult topics, while others prefer to maintain their privacy, and process their emotions by thinking them through. There is no one right or best approach.
As we come back to work and recover from what for most of us has at least been a period of some trauma, I think it is worthwhile that we become aware of the types of mental health responses that we are likely to see in our community. These are described in the chart below, authored by a colleague, Bob Ursano MD, a highly respected military psychiatrist at the Uniformed Services University, Bethesda, Maryland.

What this chart shows is that the good news is that while most people are affected by pandemics the great majority of us are highly resilient and cope well throughout. Many of us will show at least some distress reactions or health risk behaviors as described in the chart, most of which will only be for a short period of time and will resolve rapidly.

My advice to you is to look at the list of distress reactions and health risk behaviors, and if you see any that you or your family or loved ones have had and that persist, then focus on these and examine how you can resolve them to fully regain all your health as you move forward in the “new normal.”

Here is a chart that is used by military organizations in responding to disasters that details the core requirements to sustain health care workers of all types. It succinctly covers all we should be doing as we move forward.
UC Davis Health is fortunate in having extensive psychological and mental health support and treatment resources that you can find through the links below (see “Resources” section. It is typical of all disasters that people tend not to access these during the period of the actual disaster, but they tend to do so after the crisis is over, so do not hesitate to obtain help for yourself or your family if you need it. If you feel a co-worker or colleague at UC Davis might benefit from these resources offer the links to them.

And do bear in mind that the very common list of distress reactions and health risk behaviors need to be addressed if they persist. Utilizing these resources can move people forward from the anxiety and uncertainty brought on by the pandemic and become the guide to maintaining our resilience.

And finally, this week, I wish to highlight two of our excellent female faculty physicians who recently received national recognition, Dr. Lisa Brown and Dr. Catherine Cansino.

Dr. Brown was a featured surgeon by the organization, “Women in Thoracic Surgery.” She is an Assistant Professor of Thoracic Surgery and Clinical Director of the Comprehensive Lung Cancer Screening Program. On receiving the recognition Dr Brown commented that “Thoracic Surgery is a great fit for me because the cases can be technically challenging, and I have the opportunity to resect cancer and improve quality of life. It’s important to me to develop rapport with my patients; my aim is to practice patient-centered care. My research focuses on improving health care delivery with an emphasis on helping patients prepare for and recover from lung cancer resection.”
Dr. Catherine Cansino, Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, was featured in a review of “COVID-19 experiences from the ObGyn frontline” HERE, where she described the changes COVID-19 has had on local and regional obstetrics and gynecology practice. She specifically focused on the struggles many physicians have had in arranging childcare, and the fear of exposure to asymptomatic carriers for themselves, their patients and their families.

Thanks indeed for all that you do, Dr. Brown and Dr. Cansino.

And thanks to all staff who are returning to work, and to everyone at UC Davis Health for all that you have been doing during this pandemic, and for the success that you have had in saving lives.

Health & Well-being Resources
Emergency Pavilion
“The X-ray techs were amazing and very gentle with my baby!”

S1 Adult Annex
“No one does it better than UC Davis. They set the bar for what hospitals should be!”

T7 Medical Surgical ICU Gold
“They rushed me into a room and had everything at hand for heart problems. #1. Very fast!”

UC Davis Medical Group Folsom Clinic
“I am very satisfied and grateful for all the doctors, technicians, nurses, and support staff at UC Davis. I value our relationship and hope it continues. Thank you to all for being there for me.”

UC Davis Medical Group Natomas Clinic
“All personnel were very professional and attentive. This was my first visit and I was impressed. I was formerly a Kaiser patient and switched over to a Medicare supplemental insurance; soooo glad I did!”