A message from Dr. Peter Yellowlees, Chief Wellness Officer

This week it is a pleasure to celebrate the many years of outstanding work of pediatrician Dr. Jann Murray-García, MD, MPH, Associate Clinical Professor in the Betty Irene School of Nursing, who back in 1998 jointly coined the term “Cultural Humility”, a concept that leads us away from a notion of cultural mastery as a professional goal. Rather Cultural Humility describes individual and institutional developmental processes, characterized by lifelong learning and commitment to self-evaluation and critique, in efforts to achieve high-quality, culturally respectful, equitable care for all patients.

Dr. Murray-García joined the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing faculty at its founding, and told me she has for 10 years taught Community Connections, a yearlong course for nurses pursuing their Master’s degree in Leadership at the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing; the 4-week Summer Institute on Race and Health for medical students; and the Inter-professional Book Club. She also teaches a graduate course on race and health. With her team she has also led over 200 faculty, staff, students and community members on the Inter-professional Central Valley Road Trip.

Thank you, Dr. Murray-García, for your leadership to help us all improve our individual and community well-being.

Dr. Murray-García writes:

Over the last decade, it has been my honor to create emotionally safe, formal and informal
spaces for dialogue about the challenging issues of racial injustice and our personal and institutional roles in maintaining it.

I love this work.

I feel I was created for it and have been prepared for it my entire life, continuing the rich family legacy that sprung from the cobblestone streets of Charleston, South Carolina and that State’s rural soils tilled by my sharecropping grandparents. It is emotionally expensive and professionally perilous work, requiring humility, intense self-reflection and self-critique, but in general, I more often than not feel exhilarated by it. I can sense the authentic hunger for connection, belonging, equipping and growth in those who show up...and in myself.

But this Spring’s racial crises were different.

I could not hold that space for dialogue and felt nauseated by the thought of doing so. I felt myself crushed and suffocated by the predictability, familiarity, replication and tragedy of it all, by its resonance with the treatment of Black people in this nation since its founding. Each cycle is characterized by the death of an unarmed Black person (#1), temporary public outrage, dialogue, and protest (#2), and the receding of attention back to a non-urgent status quo of systemic racial inequality (#3).

I felt a liberating sense of wellness in the words of African American film director Ava DuVernay (“Selma”, and Netflix’ “13th”), when she was asked to give advice to White allies who want to know how to help: “You know, I really feel strongly that that’s not a question that people who are not White should answer. You know, we take on the emotional labor of racism...There are many educated [White] folk who are talking to each other about it. They need to continue to do that, so that we can save our energy for survival and thriving.”

In fact, the first thing I recommend is DuVernay’s 90-minute documentary, “13th”; then “White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People To Talk About Racism”, any other book by Robin DiAngelo, and all of her YouTube appearances; the article, “Don’t Be An Ally”; and the most recent article from Dr. Vajra Watson, a local anti-racism trainer and activist.

Please refrain from offering your unsolicited, even heartfelt perspective on recent national racial events to your Black peers, trainees or supervisees at UC Davis Health. Consider the power you wield in that scenario. What are you expecting from that encounter? Mostly, consider that if you have not previously invested the time in getting to know and care for that person past their job or duties, then the next best thing to do now is to make that investment, slowly, quietly and without fanfare, over time. The most powerful investment in their wellness, your wellness, your team’s wellness, and the wellness of patients is to diversify your work or learning environment.

Consider also that your Black colleagues probably have faced consequences for telling the truth that was requested of them in committees or in response to an example of unjust care or treatment. Believe it or not, Black students, trainees, faculty and supervisees have been “written up” for their “tone,” a tone that made someone feel uncomfortable or even physically threatened.

Please do not inundate UC Davis Health’s very few Black faculty with requests for stand-alone
Grand Rounds presentations or residency lectures. We have worked diligently to prepare ourselves technically for this need, as has any UC Davis Health physician or employee with specific, reimbursable skills. Respectfully, we are not here to do this without fair compensation, without administrative support, or without a longitudinal plan for departmental and institutional change.

As the Director for Social Justice and Immersive Learning in the Office of Health Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, I will offer several opportunities for 3-day trainings (including 2 half days) for UC Davis Health employees. The first will occur on Friday, July 31; Saturday (half day), August 1; and Friday, August 7 (half day). Email me if you are interested.

For the record, my wellness is restored by my family, the ocean, a small network of close friends and colleagues of all races and ethnicities who also do this work, and my faith. Those are my ways of wellness.

Photos of the Murray-García family at Moss Beach, California.
“Superior healers, my care was extraordinary.”

Tower 8 Transplant/Special Care

Cancer Center Medical Oncology
“I have been very impressed how nice and helpful all the medical staff have been at the cancer center. I am very thankful.”

**UC Davis Medical Group Folsom Rheumatology**
“Keep up the GOOD WORK! Thank you for ALL you do for me, I really appreciate it!”

**Emergency Pavilion**
“Person who checked me in was great!”

**UC Davis Medical Group Carmichael Clinic**
“I have been very impressed with all of the doctors and staff at the UC Davis Carmichael Clinic. They are wonderful and collaborate very well.”