A message from Dr. Peter Yellowlees, Chief Wellness Officer

How voting and careful fact-checking the accuracy of public statements can improve your well-being

“I can Handle the Truth....It’s the Lies that Kill me.”
– Author unknown

At this time when different people believe they have different facts upon which they then make decisions, and we know that making sure we vote is good for our health (as Dr. Katren Tyler described in an email last week to fellow physicians), the underlying question remains: How do we assess the information we use to help make our voting decisions?

Let’s start with the importance of voting. Dr. Tyler wrote: “Civic participation, especially voting, has been shown to improve self-reported subjective health status and improves secondary health benefits for patients. The direct relationship between health and voting is complicated; poor health is associated with lower rates of voting. Early evidence suggests that voting can improve individual health outcomes; and voting improves the social determinants of health. Civic participation adds meaning to our work, empowering the people that we serve.”

Dr. Tyler noted that UC Davis Health has joined a large number of institutions across the country in the VotER initiative, established by Alister Martin, MD, an emergency physician in Boston. VotER is a nonpartisan effort to increase voter registration in patients visiting health systems. I sincerely hope that many of us are following the lead of the UC Davis Health Department of Emergency Medicine in advocating in a nonpartisan manner for our patients, our friends and family, and our social networks, to vote. The civic participation involved in
voting is good for all.

In order to vote, however, we have to make many careful and important decisions, especially in relation to the extraordinary amount of discussion, and concern, about “fake news” and “alternative facts.” These can be confusing, dramatic, frightening and ultimately very stressful. Some of this is produced for the exact purpose of making people feel that voting is pointless – in other words to suppress the vote. This must not happen. We need to ensure that when we make our voting decision, that it is not made on the basis of fear, psychological intimidation or untruths.

So how should we fact-check information we are reviewing to ensure its veracity? An excellent post on the subject is available on FactCheck.org. The authors suggest seven simple measures we can all apply:

1. Consider the source – is it reputable or not?
2. Read beyond the headline – a provocative headline may draw your attention, but it seldom tells the whole story
3. Check the author – do they exist, and have they the reputation they claim?
4. Examine the quoted support for the piece – what are the sources and evidence, and do they exist
5. Check the date – frequently false news consists of distortions of old real news that are repeated many times in differing formats
6. Check your own biases – we all suffer from confirmation bias and tend to put more emphasis on information that we want to believe
7. Consult with the experts – go to FactCheck.org, Snopes.com, and PolitiFact.com; these professional fact-checkers are likely to have already checked the latest viral claim by the time you have seen it

Thank you for thinking critically about the content of public information and messaging, and for encouraging voting by all in a nonpartisan way. This is good for your health and well-being. It is fortunate that in this time of COVID-19 all Californians are able to “Vote Safe” either by absentee/mail ballot, or through a variety of early voting or election day options. So do please take advantage of these, improve your resilience, and keep well.

And speaking of keeping well: I strongly encourage everyone to sign up for at least a couple of virtual sessions in the upcoming Thriving in Turbulent Times series (Oct. 6 to Nov. 19). These excellent webinars and workshops, open and free to all UC Davis Health employees, will provide practical tips and guidance to bolster your resilience. During this difficult year for all of us, we can certainly use the additional tools in our toolkit to help us thrive, professionally and personally.
UC Davis Medical Group Rocklin Clinic
“Called late Monday afternoon, got an appointment and was seen the following morning. Same day appointment for medical issue really works.”

UC Davis Medical Group Carmichael Clinic
“I wouldn't go anywhere else for my care!! Thank you UC Davis.”

Emergency Pavilion
“You guys rocked. I was in enormous pain when I arrived and was immediately taken care of.”

T3 Women's Health Pavilion
“I am so thankful to the GI Lab staff for staying over to do my ERCP so that I could be discharged the next day. They were very nice to me and I really appreciated them.”

UC Davis Medical Group Auburn Clinic
“I was treated extremely nice. I was very confident that I was in good hands.”