A message from Dr. Peter Yellowlees, Chief Wellness Officer

Holiday decorations are going up early this year – and are good for our well-being!

Although it’s not uncommon to see holiday lights beginning to light up neighborhoods throughout our community following Thanksgiving, this year is noticeably different. People started decorating their houses and yards way before Thanksgiving. Mariah Carey’s “All I Want for Christmas” has been playing for weeks. Holiday movies are already heavily advertised. People are openly talking about wanting to see and enjoy all the holiday lights – early. The holiday season can bring joy to many of us and maybe this year in particular we all need more joy than usual.

My wife and I don’t usually put our decorations up until a week after Thanksgiving, but this year, like for many others, everything was different for us. We put our tree in place early, fully ornamented and lit on Thanksgiving Day just before dark. The day after Thanksgiving we spent most of our time pulling out the rest of our holiday decorations and by that evening we were in full holiday mode. Going through the boxes of ornaments made us think of past holidays when we would have had lots of friends and family over by now. Like many others we connected to family and friends via Zoom to compare notes on how the turkey came out and to make plans for the next few weeks. We have already watched “Scrooged” and “National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation” (for reference, here’s Chevy Chase turning on his Christmas lights). Now our home feels ready for the season’s activities and blessings.

This year, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is hardly surprising that we, like so many in our community, are starting our holiday season celebrations early, and doing so in such an overt
and visible manner. Why is this? There are several main reasons to consider.

Firstly, holidays are usually positive family-oriented events, and we particularly need to find a little joy wherever possible this year. We are all acutely aware of the rising cases of COVID-19 and the stress our colleagues and our community continues to endure. It is going to be a very challenging time for all of us. The fact that so many have chosen to get the holiday season going early makes sense. It helps to find some positive distractions as a release. Opening up the boxes of ornaments and talking about previous holiday events can be a much-needed diversion. Joy and hope, compassion and gratitude, love and caring, are all implicitly central to our holiday activities, and are core to our internal needs as humans.

Secondly, most holidays are times when we rejoice in both memories and traditions, whatever our religion, culture or beliefs. They are anniversaries when we think about past events and loved ones. Those people especially who have been important to us, and who we remember and cherish. It is a time when we seek both solace and joy in our traditions. These are different for every family and are often driven and remembered especially by our children who love the security of repetition and predictability from year to year.

These needs are especially great this year. A recent paper analyzed the social structure of those families who have lost a loved one from COVID-19, and calculated that on average every American who has passed has left nine first-degree relatives (parents, children, siblings and grandparents) who are grieving them. A total of about three million people in this country have lost a first-degree relative to COVID-19 and will grieve them for the first time this holiday season. Please think of them, and acknowledge their grief and loss. A kind compassionate word goes a long way.

It is the continuing uncertainty of the pandemic, and losses like these, that are driving our need to make ourselves feel better, and to celebrate the holiday season early. Celebrating the season and our beliefs is very important, while we continue to live in accordance with public health guidelines, and acknowledge the losses around us, because it does make us feel better even at a time of grief and distress.

So I encourage you all to put up your holiday decorations and enjoy your memories and traditions. Drive around your neighborhood and look at the lights. We can get back to a more usual holiday season next year, hopefully with much more social interactions, with more hugging, but this year we should make the most of what we have. So join me in putting up your decorations and celebrate the season as early as you want.
E4 Accelerated Access
“Thank goodness for all of you and the sacrifices you made to attain your skills!”

D12 Surgical Specialties
“These people deserve special thank yous - I so appreciated them.”

Emergency Pavilion
“Awesome experience. The ED was busy yet moved along very well.”

UC Davis Medical Group Midtown Family Practice
“Excellent service and professional support staff.”

UC Davis Medical Group Folsom Clinic
“I like the staff here! They know what they’re doing, listen to my needs, and find answers for me.”