A message from Dr. Peter Yellowlees, Chief Wellness Officer

Thank you to our Peer Responders

As many of you will know, the well-being of all our staff is even more critical than ever at this difficult time. We have all been receiving messages and information about the importance of public health measures to protect ourselves, our colleagues and patients, our families and our community. Today I want to focus on two positive issues that are good for us.

Firstly I want to highlight the over 350 multidisciplinary staff who are trained as Peer Responders at UC Davis as part of our Support U program and to make everyone aware that they are here to help, to listen, and if necessary to advise on the many available resources we have for all our staff. We hope to train several hundred more staff so welcome all who would like this training; please email mjlinenberger@ucdavis.edu for details.

The UC Davis Health Support U Peer Responder Program – originally developed and driven by Michelle Linenberger RN, an amazing Nurse Educator in the Children’s Hospital – represents an organizational shift focusing on a supportive approach to wellness by trained multidisciplinary Peer Responders for all members of our health care community.

As Michelle Dossett MD, a recently trained Support U Peer Responder, says: “Data shows that peer support is a very powerful and effective way to mitigate the negative effects of stress. We have all benefited from a supportive, listening presence at one point or another in our lives. I’m glad that UC Davis is expanding its Support U Peer Responder Program and appreciate the opportunity to serve as one.”
Michelle Linenberger RN describes the program as follows: “The goal is to prevent isolation and promote staff wellness throughout the health care system through the connection with peer support. Our team of over 350 trained peer volunteers can easily be identified, with the new Peer Responder badge buddies that are worn by nurses, physicians, HUSCS, residents, lift team, pharmacy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, respiratory therapy and many other safe individuals at UC Davis Health. We need to remember that these voluntary encounters can help to change the culture in health care. Offering support helps to lay the groundwork for your colleague to access resources. This supportive connection to the UC Davis Health community of Peer Responders can prevent the isolation experienced by staff members and help to promote wellness. The Support U Peer Responder Program is one of the most meaningful things that I have done in my career here at UC Davis Health. I am proud to work for a health system that provides a multidisciplinary peer support network to help our colleagues regain balance and foster resilience.”

Katren Tyler MD is one of the core team of Peer Responders and said this: “How can we help each other and ourselves get through these next few months? One part of a solution is a peer responder program, like Support U here at UC Davis. Peer responder programs recognize the stressors inherent in our work and have someone virtually walk alongside you. It’s not a talk with a friend, but it can help lift you up. It is not therapy or any form of mental health intervention, yet it can relieve some of the angst. Talking with a Peer Responder can help reframe the issue and simplify the path forward. At the most basic, peer responder programs recognize that we are social animals, and that solutions to our problems often involve talking through the issues. If you are struggling, or you recognize that a peer is struggling, consider reaching out to one of our Support U Peer Responders.”

Maggie Rea, Ph.D., who has been actively providing peer support for several years, took a more personal perspective: “What I try to provide when offering peer support, is a safe space to process the stress and pain that can come from working in health care. I try hard to empathize and let the individual or group know that they are not alone and I work to normalize their experience so they do not feel they are failing by needing support. I remind them of our common humanity and validate the stress and pain they can be experiencing. I might need to remind them of all the positive impact they are having, especially when they are focused on a negative outcome or they are worrying about whether they are making a difference. In our time together, we explore ways to support their healthy coping and ensure they know of the resources available. I always leave honored that an individual or group has allowed me the chance to offer support and I hope they leave feeling connected, validated and part of a compassionate and caring community.”

So thank you to every one of our 350+ Peer Responders identified by their badge buddies, or via nursing or unit supervisors, or the Support U website. Do please reach out if you feel the need.

I believe that one of the positive outcomes from the pandemic will be a greater focus on the well-being of health care workers from all disciplines and backgrounds, with more emphasis on working together and supporting each other. Support U is a very positive move in that direction and we hope that it helps drive a culture change in health care where it is OK to ask for help, and to receive support. After all, health care is a team sport, and teams support each other.

Secondly, I would like to suggest that you all spend a few minutes reading a fascinating article...
in last Friday’s New York Times by David Leonhardt, who offers a three-step guide to living safely during COVID-19, based on a survey of over 700 epidemiologists. He advises:

1. **There is one behavior you should try to eliminate, without exception:** Spending time in a confined space (outside your household) where anyone is unmasked.

2. **This next set of behaviors is best to minimize if you can’t avoid it:** Spending extended time in indoor spaces, even with universal masking, because masks aren’t perfect.

3. **Now the better news: Several activities are less risky than some people fear.** You don’t need to wear a mask when you go for a walk, cycle or jog. Just keep six feet distant from others. You can also feel OK about doing many errands. About 90 percent of the epidemiologists had recently visited a grocery store, a pharmacy or another store. Just wear a mask, stay distant from others and wash your hands afterward.

My bottom line over the holidays? Treat everyone outside of your immediate family who you meet indoors as if they were positive for COVID, and spend as much time wisely outside as you can.

Best wishes and thanks to all. Remember that this time will pass.

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_Urology Clinic Ambulatory Care Center_

“Nurse who removed catheter put me at ease about the procedure and created a positive friendly environment.”

_UC Davis Medical Group Auburn Clinic_

“Seems to be a great staff team. Very refreshing.”

_Cancer Center Medical Oncology_

“I’m very confident with ALL the members of my health care team.”
Cardiology Clinic Ambulatory Care Center
“I’m a former employee at the Med Center and I was & still am (especially during this pandemic) concerned and observant as to infection control issues. Everyone that I have observed in the Cardiology Clinic is very good with these practices.”

CSC PACU Boarding
“UC Davis made sure I understood everything; it made the procedure less scary.”