



The Wellness Wire

Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine

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An initiative of the Faculty Assembly Steering Committee, the Office of Medical Student Support Services, the Fit & Well Committee, the Assistant Dean of Faculty Development, and the Division of Education and Faculty Development in the Department of Humanities, Health, and Society.

Greetings as we all learn to reframe our lives during these unprecedented times. Recognizing that working from home and returning to office work safely are both challenging, the Faculty Assembly Steering Committee has launched this initiative to provide resources for faculty and staff to foster our collective well-being.

Editor: Greg Schneider, MD

The Rhythm of Life

Every morning, the title character in Jim Jarmusch's film Paterson gets up at the same time, kisses his wife, and has the same breakfast bowl of Cheerios. Every day, at the same time, he arrives at the bus station where he works, and composes poems until his supervisor sends him on his route. Every evening, he takes his wife's dog for a walk and stops at a local bar where he has slow conversation with his friend the bartender. All along the way, he observes, absorbing the simple rituals of his life as raw materials for his poetry. Paterson, after all, is not only his name but the name of the town where lives, the lifelong home of William Carlos Williams, perhaps the greatest poet America has ever produced.

I will not ruin the film for you, but small rituals, and the disruption of those rituals, form the core of the story. (If you are interested, it is available on Netflix.) The suggestion seems to be that for the poet, the very essence of life spills out in the rhythm and ritual of everyday existence. It occurs to me that even if we

are not poets, life also spills out in ritual and disrupted ritual. How much we create and treasure those rituals somehow touches upon the deeper, magical, perhaps even sacred aspects of our lives. In a year like we have just had, with so much disruption, reconnecting with patterns and rhythms that help us feel connected can ground us in important ways.

At their core, rituals and ceremonies connect us to people and forces outside of ourselves. They connect us to tradition and to the past: "It's how we celebrate fill-in-the-blank." They connect us to one another: "I can't wait for board game night with my grandkids." They connect us to our communities: "Go Dolphins!" They even have the power to connect us with nature and the larger universe. May we use this time of disruption to create new rituals and to resurrect old ones that we treasure.

This is Just to Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

[William Carlos Williams, 1961]



RESOURCES, *Editor: Suzanne Minor, MD*

When I think about rituals, I think about those rituals which I have cultivated around my own usual self-care (or sometimes the lack thereof!) and my pandemic self-care rituals. I think of a ritual as a practice which I consider as having meaning or being sacred. I have learned that I can really set my day up for success with certain rituals; if I set my intention for the day, read a few pages of a spiritual book and meditate each morning, I can be more mindful, grounded and centered throughout the day. Each time I walk into a complex patient visit, I'm so grateful that I've meditated that morning and can be present to provide best care. Another ritual I embrace many times throughout the day is to mean it when I ask each patient "How can I help you today?" On my drive home, I self-assess, performing one more ritual. What stood out? Where can I grow?

Sometimes, I've needed to create a ritual in my life. When the first new car I'd bought died, I was heartbroken; I was attached to that car and what it had meant in my life. It was not a fabulous car, but it represented growth and freedom in my life. So, it needed a ritual. I said a few words and threw daisies into Biscayne Bay. To some, this ritual might have seemed silly, but for me it was vital. I told the car how grateful I was for its service and said goodbye.

Let's talk about some resources that might be useful to you as we think about rituals with respect to wellness. This [Honeycomber article](#) discusses why creating a personal ritual and regularly practicing that ritual is important in our lives; these rituals give our lives meaning and are transformative. If you only go to one of these resources, this is the one I recommend. It's elegantly simple and to the point.

This [article from Tiny Buddha](#) discusses six practices that may be useful for those who feel lost, which they define as losing track of who we are or how to care for ourselves.

This [article from thriveglobal.com](#) details ten self-care rituals to try out when you are feeling stressed or anxious: healthy cooking, an early morning run, tidying up, decluttering, giving back to the community, stretching, painting, cold showers, stay days, and daily outdoor time. Outdoor time is especially important for me. Feeling the wind on my skin and listening to palm fronds rustling in the wind is so restorative!

This [article from The Art of Living Simple](#) details seven self-care rituals that take less than fifteen minutes. I love the detail of making having a cup of tea or getting dressed into a ritual. And certainly, we can breathe anytime, and we can take three minutes and meditate when we need to throughout our day!

I wanted to include some medicine specific resources as well. This [article from Stanford Medicine](#) details author and physician Abraham Verghese's speech to graduates. Verghese speaks about the ritual of examining the patient, saying "The ritual properly performed earns you a bond with the patient. ... The ritual is timeless, and it matters." This reminds me of my examination ritual during this pandemic. There is a moment when I place my stethoscope on the patient's neck and I feel their breath on the back of my hand, coming from the lower aspect of their mask and I marvel at the intimacy and vulnerability of the moment: being a physician allows and propels me to violate physical distancing during the pandemic and this very breath that is life also carries death for so many.

This [article from the journal Perspectives in Biology and Medicine](#) talks about the rituals that exist in medicine through the lens of medical education literature – what is a healing ritual? Because this article is not easy to get to on PubMed, I'm posting it on the [Wellness Wall](#). If you want to do an academic dive into rituals, this is your resource!

