



# The Wellness Wire

## Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine

### Issue 25, 17 May 2021

*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**

#### **Structural Support**

When I was a child, I went through a phase where I wanted to be an architect. One recurrent idea involved a home design in which the centerpiece was a mobile home that locked into the surrounding structure. Together, the building looked like a normal home. The brilliance of the idea (in my pediatric mind) was that for a vacation, you simply had to unlock the RV from the rest of the home and drive off. Even with the missing core, the building would still look like a regular house from the street.

The most difficult part of the design was how to create the supports for the surrounding structure, so that it would remain sturdy and intact, with or without the locked-in Winnebago. Structural support, it turns out, is one of the most challenging aspects of architecture. How do you create an aesthetically pleasing apparatus that can withstand continuous internal forces, like gravity and wind? Such forces can sometimes be stretched to the limit by external events like earthquakes and hurricanes. If the

building is to fall, the structural supports should be such that they can guide whatever they are holding safely to the ground, in the case of an overload.

This past year has felt a lot like the empty shell of a home for many of us (ironically while we were simultaneously all stuck at home). Many of the activities, people, and events that formed the core of our lives were taken from us. We found ourselves stuck within another structure that was being tested by forces internal and external. Would our structural supports hold while we were buffeted by bearing new challenges on the inside and chaotic societal winds on the outside?

Sometimes, we can struggle to admit that we need extra support. Our own internal arches and buttresses are bending. It's OK to reach out to others for help and advice. It's OK to seek counseling. It's OK simply to let people know that you are under stress. The strongest buildings rely on internal and external structures to remain sound.

As we start to imagine ourselves getting in that Winnebago (or more likely that SUV or plane) and going on vacation and other adventures that remind us of our former lives, it is good to think of what gives us strength. If we have the ability, we might even reach out to see if we can offer support to others who might need it more than us. Unlike buildings, we have a wider range of possible supports, and we have each other. Like my imagined mobile-stationary combination home, we are strongest when we remain part of an interconnected whole.



## RESOURCES, *Editor: Suzanne Minor, MD*

Support is integral for all of us. Perusing online dictionaries for ways to characterize support, it struck me that definitions like advocate, assist, or help are the most applicable. Sometimes, we might feel that we can do it all ourselves. Yet, we were not made to function as if we were our own islands. As humans, we are social beings. Not only are we interconnected as a matter of course, we need each other. It is worth repeating – We need each other. We need to be supported and we need to support others as well.

The pandemic has challenged us all and has also revealed some unexpected silver linings. The realization that we need to ask for help and seek support may be one of those silver linings. So many of us give but don't ask for help, which might work for a while. Eventually, though, the tank runs dry and there's nothing left to give.

Support doesn't have to come from social interaction, but it often does. We may not even realize we are receiving support from others. Just today, talking to colleagues in the hallway was a way that I felt supported. Those brief moments of connecting and chatting lifted me. They helped me recognize a source of support that I used to take for granted but now really cherish (with safe distancing and mask wearing). Sometimes, we need to be more intentional about seeking out support.

[How Social Support Contributes to Psychological Health](#) on verywellmind.com discusses the importance of social support in our lives. The authors specifically note the link between poor social support and depression, loneliness, and increased risk of alcohol use, cardiovascular disease, depression, and suicide. The article describes three types of social support: emotional, instrumental, and informational. Having social support encourages healthy behaviors, improves coping with stress, and can help with motivation towards achieving goals.

[Creating a Healthier Life](#) is a 22-page online guide to wellness. It offers a concise section regarding "embracing support from others." I love this phrase. Not only may we need to ask for help from others, we may also need to grab hold of that help and accept it in our lives. Perhaps part of our returning to campus might be that we find our allies in wellness and

figuratively embrace each other in support. (Hat tip to Dr. Schneider for sharing these two resources!)

This opinion piece from Inside Higher Education lays out ways that universities can better support their faculty during these times: [Measures to Support Faculty During COVID-19](#). If any of the ideas appeal to you, speak up!

Early on in the pandemic, psychiatrists realized the need for psychological and psychiatric support for physicians and created the [Physician Support Line](#) providing free, confidential, national, peer support for physicians and medical students. The phone number is 1-888-409-0141. Although the site started for physicians, they have many resources that would benefit anyone: [Resources Page](#). What kind of support is offered? The site's FAQ states "We offer empathic and active listening, motivational interviewing, supportive therapy, collaborative problem solving, and cognitive behavioral techniques to manage acute stress, panic, depression, and insomnia. We also can help you start processing stressors including but not limited to the Covid-19 pandemic, existing mental health disorders, substance use disorders, family dynamics, childhood or current trauma, grief and loss, and chronic illness." It is hard to think of a more compassionate listing of useful support.

Our own HWCAM web resource, [Wellness During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#), lists many tools that might help to support you during this time as well.

