Greetings as we all learn to reframe our lives during these unprecedented times. Recognizing that figuring out our work and home lives during a pandemic can be 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

Resolving 2021

Forgive yourself

It’s OK if you have failed in the past to keep a resolution or even to take the first step. Many years have passed in which I have not written a single one of my newly declared “monthly letters.” ‘Everybody likes receiving actual written letters,’ my New Year’s self muses. Remind yourself that very few are successful in changing routines the first time around; self-compassion sets a much better state for improvement than self-criticism.

Pick something that’s inherently rewarding

Here’s where the love comes in. Instead of picking the typical goal, like losing weight, think instead about the positive state of being you are seeking. “I want to be healthy and strong” can be a better place to start than “I hate the way I look in the mirror.”

Get specific

Once you’ve found that positive state—“I want to feel rested; I want to feel more connected to friends and family”—then put some meat on the bones. Make it tangible, realistic, and within a reasonable time frame. (Darn those SMART goals we talk about in our Clinical Skills courses: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.) Walking once a week with your family might make a lot more sense than running an Iron Man Marathon . . .

This past year was chock full with enough fear and anxiety for a lifetime. Let’s resolve to make 2021 filled with warmer, care-filled moments, in whatever form gives you inspiration. So go do that 20-minute high intensity workout or have that weekly game of chess with your best friend.

Don’t forget about our interactive Wellness Wall.
Resources for Successful Resolutions

Editor: Suzanne Minor, MD

Self-compassion Resources
We’ve been working so hard for the last year over the course of this pandemic, making it happen and doing so quite successfully. Many of us may have an inner critic that has pushed us to be so successful. While this may work during crises, in the long run, it’s not sustainable. Self-compassion is vital to counter this inner critic, so that we can optimally functioning and have high quality of inner life.

Kristen Neff, PhD is known for her research into self-compassion. Her webpage defines self-compassion, explores the research around self-compassion, offers practices and trainings to cultivate self-compassion, and tests your level of self-compassion. Dr. Neff notes that the word compassion literally means “to suffer with” and that having compassion for oneself is no different than having compassion for others. To have compassion for others, you must notice that they are suffering. Compassion involves feeling moved by the others’ suffering. This response to others’ suffering may be described as a feeling of warmth, caring, and the desire to help the suffering person in some way. Having compassion also means that you “offer understanding and kindness to others when they fail or make mistakes, rather than judging them harshly” and “you realize that suffering, failure, and imperfection is part of the shared human experience.” Thus, the three elements of self-compassion are self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

Dr. Neff also offers guided meditations and exercises that you can do to develop your self-compassion. The guided meditation videos range from five to 24 minutes, so even if you only have a few minutes, you can practice! The eight exercises are practical, concrete assignments with detailed instructions. Examples include: Exercise 1: How would you treat a friend; Exercise 7: Identifying what we really want; and Exercise 8: Taking care of the caregiver.

Another excellent article on self-compassion describes some specific tips you can use to divert or quiet our inner critic. One of the tips is to use the “VARY” acronym devised by psychoanalyst Nina Savelle-Rocklin, PsyD. By validating, acknowledging, and reassuring ourselves, we can reframe that inner critical voice.

Resolution Resources
Now that we’ve taken a deep dive into self-compassion, let’s detail some resolution resources! At the HWCOM, we teach our students about how to use the tools of motivational interviewing to assist patients in setting and achieving goals. As I read through these resources, I was struck by how similar many of them are!

This article from the American Psychological Association encourages us to start small and change just one behavior at a time. “By making your resolutions realistic, there is a greater chance that you will keep them throughout the year, incorporating healthy behavior into your everyday life.”

This article from Very Well Mind explains ten psychological strategies for helping you to stick to your goals. By focusing our goals and planning ahead, we can increase our success with following through and achieving them.

This Lifehack article describes ten tips for making your new year’s resolutions come true. One tip is to push yourself by not setting limits for yourself, while another tip reminds you to know when to take a break. Sometimes, finding the balance can take practice!

This theconversation.com article offers nine tips to give yourself the best shot at sticking to New Year’s resolutions. One tip is to be sure to link resolutions to meaningful values. Tapping into what we find important and worthwhile is also a tool that can be useful in staying off burnout!