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### Our Changing World...

In the last few weeks, we all have experienced changes in the world we live in. Some of us to a greater extent than others. While change can be a very positive experience, change that negatively impacts our lives can be stressful and anxiety producing. Sometimes the changes we experience create feelings of loss or the loss of our ability to follow the normal course of our lives.

When such losses occur, we can experience a wide variety of emotions. How we deal with our losses and ultimately our emotions are important aspects of our well-being.

Right now, some place in our country or city or in our collective workplaces – someone is experiencing loss. It could be in the form of a lost job, our lost ability to meet with friend, the loss of someone we have provided care to or more significantly, the loss of a friend or loved one.

While we may associate grief most naturally with a loss due to death, the grieving process occurs with other significant losses in our lives as well. Today, in our communities, we are faced with challenges that we could not have imagined just a few weeks ago.

In healthcare, if you have served patients for any amount of time in your career, you may have experienced the death of a patient. Whether you were the doctor or the nurse or the person drawing blood or taking the x-rays or cleaning the patient's room or serving their food, in some form or fashion the loss of life is real. Today, more than ever in healthcare, patients are dying in much greater numbers than we typically experience. This too can add to our sense of loss.

In a recent article written by Scott Berinato, Senior Editor at Harvard Business Review, "*Emotional Intelligence: That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief*"<sup>1</sup>; Mr. Berinato interviewed David Kessler, co-author with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*. In the article, Mr. Kessler shared several thoughts about the emotions we are experiencing during this pandemic. He reminds us that the stages of grief are not sequential, in other words we don't progress smoothly from one stage to the next but can experience them in any order and more than one time. When we think about the stages of grief as they connect to our current COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Kessler provides the following explanation:

*"There's denial, which we say a lot of early on: This virus won't affect us. There's anger: You're making me stay home and taking away my activities. There's bargaining: Okay, if I social distance for two weeks everything will be better, right? There's sadness: I don't know when this will end. And finally, there's acceptance. This is happening; I have to figure out how to proceed."*<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Kessler suggests our power lies in acceptance. There is control in acceptance and we can control what we do to stay safe and keep our patients safe:

**Wash our hands!** Remember to soap your hands and wash them for 20 seconds – sing Happy Birthday two times or sing your ABC's. If soap and water aren't available, use hand sanitizer.

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**Cover your mouth / nose when coughing or sneezing.** Cough or sneeze in a tissue and immediately throw it away – please don't save it to use again and of course wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue immediately available, cough or sneeze in the bend of your arm.

**Refrain from touching your face.** Let's not introduce any residual germs from our hands into our eyes, nose, or mouth by touching our faces.

**Practice social distancing when possible** – stay at least 6 feet away from others. Social distancing is not practical of course when providing direct patient care, so then what? Put your Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on carefully and remove it carefully as well...and then you guessed it...wash your hands!

**Explore your opportunity to work virtually.** If you are not providing direct patient care and are able to work virtually – do so. There are many things to consider and to prepare for when working virtually but it can be done with proper planning.

As we journey through each day, take time to recognize your feelings. Part of being emotionally intelligent is our ability to recognize our feelings and subsequent emotions. Managing how we interact and communicate with each other will be key during this stressful time. Mr. Kessler tells us in the article penned by Mr. Berinato, "Emotions need motion."<sup>1</sup> What exactly does that mean? First, we need to identify what we are feeling and most importantly not discount those feelings. Our emotions are real and what emotion is triggered in one person may not be the same emotion that is triggered in another person. So, the lesson here is to name how we are feeling, acknowledge it, and accept it in order to work through it.

What's next? Let's start by making time to take care of ourselves – eat well balanced meals, get enough rest, take a moment to breathe. If we do not take care of ourselves today, we will not be able to serve our patients tomorrow.

Here are a few additional ways to help all of us along the journey ahead:

Talk with a friend.

Talk with a co-worker.


Be a good listener if someone needs to talk.

Do something you enjoy within the constraints of where you are now.

Do something positive for yourself or someone else – little things mean a lot.

Ask for help when you need it – does your organization provide an Employee Assistance Program? Are you associated with a church, synagogue, mosque, or some other belief? Can you speak with your doctor or nurse practitioner or counselor?

The CDC / NIOSH also has several "Workplace Health Resources" including a variety of guidance documents addressing stress recognition and management available at <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/tools-resources/workplace-health/stress.html>.



Most of all remember, you are not alone, and we are all in this together. There will be better days ahead!

Reference:

<sup>1</sup>Berinato, S., Emotional intelligence: That discomfort you are feeling is grief., 03/23/2020, Harvard Business Review, <https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>