

"Unintended luxuries..."

For 4/2/2020

My wife, Kim, has been working from home the past two weeks due to the COVID-19 outbreak. She splits her work time as a project manager for dental research programs with both Health Partners and the University of Minnesota Dental School. She shared with me an email sent by Jakub Tolar, MD, PhD, the Campus Public Health Officer (CPHO) at the U of M. I want to share it with you.

Doctor Tolar writes:

"Think, for a moment, about grains of sand pouring through an hourglass. As each grain adds to the pile below, a familiar conical shape emerges. At certain points, the next grain destabilizes the pile and the cone shifts, but the conical shape re-forms again and again.

Our thinking in a time of crisis works a lot like this. We believe we understand the situation--we begin to shape it in our minds and control it--and new facts emerge that disrupt both the image we have shaped and our feelings of control. It is not an unfamiliar process, but one that is greatly accelerated and repeated as we deal with the realities of COVID-19 and its impact on our lives. Remarkably, we adapt and move forward again and again.

Although what we are dealing with is unusual, we do have ways to control our own behaviors, and protect our emotional wellbeing. If all we are able to think about is the worry of this time, these patterns will literally ingrain themselves in the neural pathways of our brains. Fortunately, art, science, and society give us ways to develop a healthier response.

ENGAGE: Reach out to friends and family. Include non-digital ways like letters and phone calls.

VOLUNTEER: Food banks need to remain operational, blood supplies are low, and notes of encouragement are welcome at any healthcare facility--for nurses, clinicians, staff, residents, and fellows.

REFLECT: There are thousands of ways to rest and replenish your spirit.

IMPROVE YOUR BRAIN: At a time when we are immersed in the science needed to respond to COVID-19, art can help us stay whole. Make or listen to music, read a book, draw, dance. What speaks to you?

EXERCISE: Proven to boost mental health as well as physical, staying active is critical to being prepared for the challenges ahead. Pace yourself, do what you can, and know that we are training for a marathon, not a sprint.

I know that you face enormous demands on your time and doing these things may seem like a luxury. If possible, allow yourself to take the time. Staying whole and resilient is a critical part of your work as caregiver, researcher, support, or student. We all have our own role to play as we meet the challenges of the future together."

Doctor Tolar's words ring true to me, and I am certain also to you. I encourage you to respond to the call to engage in "holy practices" of prayer, reflection, music and art, studying scripture, and connecting to others. God is ever present with us and deeply caring for his beloved creation...each one of us.

"Thus says the LORD: The people who survived the sword and found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to me from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."
(Jeremiah 31:2-3)

Find joy in the "Unintended luxuries" of this time and space.

Peace and all good.
Randy+