



A Moment of Wellness

Lessons Learned

By Amaryllis Sánchez Wohlever, MD

As the New Year approached, 2020 made it easy to recall the challenges and joys of an unsettling year. Regardless of our individual circumstances, the pandemic turned our lives upside down, challenged much we took for granted, and forced us to ponder the impact of our behavior on our health and the well-being of others. For us as physicians, our duty to educate the public about medical matters and illuminate the role of science in public health took on a whole new meaning.

With the vaccination phase now underway and a new hope rising on the horizon, stopping to contemplate all that has occurred will prepare us to receive the next 358 days with renewed focus. For instance, some of us lost loved ones to COVID-19. We have seen our colleagues struggle to keep their practices afloat and their families secure, and some had to close their doors. Some of us have used the same N95 mask for months and lived through the infection ourselves, with or

without sequelae. And all of us adapted to constant change in life and work, and sense more changes coming.

The word “uncertainty” describes much of our experience in 2020, and we gained proficiency at balancing life on its shaky ground.

Thankfully, as 2021 begins, several vaccines to fight the novel virus are already in distribution. Although many people still don't grasp the significance of this major achievement, those of us who lived through the HIV crisis and witnessed the likes of the Ebola challenge feel a deep sense of gratitude, even wonder, at what we can accomplish when we work together, using our knowledge to serve humanity.

Zero scholarly articles about SARS-CoV2 were available when 2020 began. By Feb. 9, 105 articles were published. As of the third week of December 2020, more than 82,000 articles had

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been published worldwide about this virus. In just one week in August, over 4,300 peer-reviewed articles became available and searchable on PubMed about this one, brand new microscopic enemy. Isn't that an astounding response to this worldwide emergency? Imagine how different the HIV crisis would have been in the '80s if we'd had such global resources at our disposal. I am in awe of this body of knowledge that makes so much possible — the best of the digital era in the service of global health.

A Deliberate Pause

As we welcome a new year that will surely bring its own challenges, I invite you to consider how this experience will continue to impact each of us as we make daily choices. How does it change how we think of the poor, the homeless, and all those less fortunate than we are in our communities and nation? How does it impact our compassion and commitment to other human beings and to our own wellbeing?

Moreover, what will we do to recall and nurture the blessings and joys the pandemic has brought, such as more time with family, greater focus on physical activity and healthy behaviors, more time in nature, more simplicity in daily life?

What is the meaning of all this, and how will we let it transform us?

Our answers will vary, but we will all need to be intentional so the lessons of this collective and individual experience will bear good fruit that endures in our lives, and enhances our collective welfare as well.

21 Actions for 2021

Each new year, I choose a new word to anchor me to purpose daily. This year, beyond my word and the verse that goes with it, I'm writing 21 actions to implement throughout the year to celebrate and cultivate all I learned in the pandemic, so the learning takes hold, creating habits that last. Some of my 21 actions include continuing to send handwritten letters and learning about other cultures, going for more walks with my neighbors, playing tennis, and reaching out to someone new each week—an old friend or a family member—by phone or mail. I also plan to volunteer again at Give Kids the World, a village in Central Florida where children and families experience generosity and kindness to ease their suffering.

As I continue to add slowly to my list of 21 actions, I feel so grateful that a new year has arrived. I need it. We need it. The world needs it. But let's be sure to pause longer than usual this time before turning the corner to what's next. Let's be sure we squeeze all the learning we can out of this trial, so every ounce of suffering is redeemed, and we experience the joy that awaits those who endure with intention and hope.

Your Wellness Moment: We're about to receive the gift of more time. How will we unwrap it and use it for good?

Resources

LitCovid database of curated PubMed articles

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