

Monday Message: January 6, 2025

Happy New Year to all!

I hope you all had a good holiday with family and friends and are coming to work refreshed and recharged!

Looking forward to the winter I think of the phrase: " the dark cold days of winter". But really those dark days are in November and December as the days get shorter and shorter. To make matters worse, the weather in November and December is dreary, rainy, damp and cold.

In January, the winter solstice is behind us and the days are getting longer. Yes, is it cold, but we have bright sunny days . We may have snow, but in Halifax folks are sensible and stay home if they can.

So back to work, looking forward to longer days with more sunlight!

Have a good week
gail

Monday Message: January 13, 2025

Recently I was asked what I am doing about admin assistants working from home. Nothing I said. Our admin assistants are accountable to the surgeon for whom they work so I don't interfere with their arrangements. As long as the work gets done all is well.

So, what is the issue?

Working from home allows us to do our work remotely in our zoom shirt and sweatpants, get a coffee anytime, walk the dog, pick up kids from school, or watch the kids if they are at home. Work from home saves time, money and air pollution since we don't have to do the commute.

Several large companies-- Google for example, have mandated back to work. Do they think their employees weren't doing their jobs while at home? I doubt this is the case. The results of studies of work from home vary in terms of productivity for folks but my recollection is that overall people are just as productive working from home.

So, what is the benefit of coming back to work? Human interaction. We recently had a large-scale human experiment called COVID. The research coming out of COVID reports the damaging effects of isolation on our mental wellbeing with increasing rates of depression, suicide, and anxiety. Humans are social beings; we thrive on social interactions.

From an organizational perspective, Google knows that working together in person, we come up with better ideas, we problem solve more effectively, and we are more innovative. For a company like Google being together at work makes sense.

What about us in the Department of Surgery? Clearly the work is getting done. But I have to admit that walking down the hall and seeing all the doors closed, makes me feel isolated. Last week several doors were open, and I had the opportunity to say good morning-- it brightened my day immediately. Some of the surgeons were in their offices with their doors open and I was able to have a chat and address some issues-- directly, immediately!

On January 28th at 5 pm, we are having a presentation together with WellDoc Alberta on mental health in surgeons and other physicians. It is on Zoom at 5 pm. I encourage you to zoom in.

We need to take care of ourselves. Awareness and knowledge can help. In the meantime, greet folks in the morning- it will get your day off to a good start!

Have a great week

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Monday Message: January 20, 2025

Well, the second Trump presidency is upon us. The news feeds are full of Trump. The Economist is full of Trump. The Globe and Mail is full of Trump. TV is full of Trump. Unfortunately, I was subjected to watching some of the pre-inauguration rally. It was beyond belief. However, we now have to face it. I suspect most of us will keep our head down and keep working, doing our best for our patients. Really that is all most of us can do. For me I may have to finally stop reading /watching the news! I think it is bad for my mental health and my wellbeing.

On a positive note, there is a ceasefire in Gaza, the first 3 hostages have been released, and the first group of Palestinian prisoners have been released. Apparently aid trucks are getting into Gaza and people are returning to their "homes" which of course no longer exist. There is an interesting juxtaposition of the destruction in Gaza and the destruction in LA. Not even close.

I may be a bit defeatist but I have never been one to beat my head against a wall so I try to influence/change what I can in my sphere of influence whether that is the outcome of a patient in front of me or policy within our health care system. I try to stick to my principles, my morals and ethics. That is the best I can do.

I recently read a book " Small things like these" by Claire Keegan. A friend who read the book told me "that the story reaffirmed the importance of compassion and integrity in everything we do no matter how ordinary the act might seem", and that "courage, whether in our personal lives or professional endeavors, is rarely without impact, even if it feels small at the the time.

So, in the is time of turmoil, please continue those small daily acts of courage and compassion. You will make a difference.

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Monday Message: January 27, 2025

There is a lot of emphasis on wellness and burnout these days. This grew out of the pandemic. But here we are stilling talking about it. We have learned a lot about wellness and how to improve our wellness. We have heard a lot about burnout and what drives it. We don't hear a lot about mental health but there is subtle awareness that mental health issues affect physicians, and we are reminded of resources that are available through DNS and NSH.

What is wellness? What is burnout? How is burnout different from depression?
Please join me on Tuesday at 5 pm for a chat with Dr Jane Lemaire and Dr Rachel Grimink of Welldoc Canada. We will be discussing these things.

We will also share with you some sobering statistics that identify us as surgeons as being particularly at risk. Dr Grimink will illustrate that depression is not just feeling down and that as resilient surgeons we just need to keep going.

I know most of you are thinking-- I am fine-- I don't need this- but I would encourage you to join in anyway. And please share this with your residents- they need this just as much as we do.

Have a good week

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