

Monday Message, Monday, May 5, 2025

Spring in Halifax. Is it here?

The signs are increasing. Some trees are budding. An azalea bush in front of my building is actually blooming.

The beach volleyball "court" by the boardwalk was in use all weekend. The outdoor tables at Sea Smoke were full.

I was going to write about the parking situation but I wanted to start on a positive note! What can I say? Not so bad for me as I can walk to work. But most of our staff depend on their cars to get to work. Walking is not an option. Public transit might be an option for some - but typically adds substantial time to the commute. Taxis? Ubers?
It is a nice idea to have free parking for patients.

It is ironic that we have all these days or weeks to honour our various staff groups-- nursing, perfusion, physio, respiratory therapists, even a doctor's day celebration, but the real things that demonstrate acknowledgement and respect for our contributions-- including parking — are ignored. How many times have I heard people say-- "just let me do my job".

Our nursing unions have pointed out that something which appears to be basic and essential-- like safe parking- is an issue for retention and recruitment. It is so basic, most of us wouldn't not even inquire about it when looking at a job. There are many opportunities for our staff outside of downtown Halifax. I hope the parking problem gets sorted today because tomorrow may be too late.

We come to work every day because we want to help patients. We all have a role to play in providing care. There are a few things we need to facilitate this. Most of us can't do our work from home. We have to be onsite. We need parking .

Hoping for a rapid resolution to this issue!
gail

Monday Message, Monday, May 12, 2025

Community.

Humans are social beings. We need to connect with other humans.

There is so much talk about wellness, mindfulness, meditation etc. All good things.

Why is this such a popular topic? I believe it grew out of the isolation of COVID.

We continue the habits learned in COVID: working from home; going to our office between cases instead of going to the surgeons lounge — or should I say the lounge- because of course the surgeon's lounge no longer exists.

When I think back to my days as a clinical clerk and what attracted me to surgery- I loved being part of the team. In those days there were no rules about work hours or post call day off. We worked hard, we worked long hours, we spent a lot of time together. It was wonderful. These were my people! This was my community.

I still feel that way. I love hanging out with surgeons. We have a shared experience, generally we think about things in a similar way, we understand each other. I was heartened by a meeting I had recently with the general surgery residents. I was worried that the modern work hours rules would have a negative impact on that sense of community I had experienced as a resident. But it turns out that working 24/7 is not a mandatory component of being part of the community!! This is good news!

I thought about this concept of community after reading about a tent encampment beside a church in Toronto. The minister of the church understood why the people in the encampment were there together. They had their own space but they were together in a community. She spoke of how they helped each other, sheltered those in need, shared even though they had almost nothing.

We are privileged: we have our own homes with multiple bedrooms and bathrooms. We throw out more food than some of these people eat in a week. This is not a criticism. My eldest son somehow tried to make me feel guilty for my privilege. I protested that I had worked hard all my life and felt that I had earned these privileges. I don't think the point of this is that we should feel guilty. Rather we should feel grateful and we should be generous.

We should not look at the tent encampments with judgement and disdain. The people in the encampments are perhaps different from us but just as human, seeking to live in a community where those around them have a shared experience and accept one another.

How does this relate to wellness?-Gratitude. Be grateful for all that you have, all that you have achieved and the wonderful community in which you live and work. Our beefs are trivial when you think about those in the tent encampments. We have a great deal for which to be grateful

I will be visiting our surgeon colleagues in Cape Breton this week and checking out the new medical school.

Have a good week

gail

Monday Message, Tuesday, May 20, 2025

Congratulation to Brad Marchand and the Florida Panthers for defeating the Toronto Maple Leafs in game 7 of the second round of the playoffs. Of course, all of us Toronto Maple Leaf fans are in the doldrums. Somehow we all think this year will be different! But no.

The weather didn't help either. Misty, wet fog, not really rain but you still got wet. It seems to me that this is pretty standard for the May long weekend- lousy weather or at least my recollection of the first camping weekend of the year when I was growing up.

On top of all of this, I was feeling kind of "blah" about work. We are in the process of striking a governance committee. One of the key mandates of the governance committee is to evaluate the performance of the Department Head. Am I doing my job? So I was reflecting on this and realized that there are things I can't fix, system changes I can't make, goals that I won't achieve. Woe is me!

But then Dr Andrea Lantz Powers of the Department of Urology sent me an email about Joy in Work and a course she took at the Institute of Health Improvement. In the face of all that is going on in healthcare, can we find joy in our work? We have a head start on this concept because the fundamental nature of our work is helping people which in turn gives our work meaning and purpose. A couple of years ago, the Faculty of Medicine asked us to participate in a survey on burnout. Surgeons scored lower on burnout than other specialties because we rated our work higher in terms of giving us meaning and purpose, despite the long work hours etc.

The attached white paper outlines the "why" and the "how". One concept that I thought was important was the idea that we should focus on what is good in our system-- ie our assets- rather than focusing only on gaps and deficits. Changing our perspective, and leveraging out assets may yield innovative solutions. But it also promotes something I spoke about in last week's message; gratitude. You might say this a Pollyanna approach but focusing on the positive things in our work may help us overcome that sense of helplessness and hopelessness that is nurtured by the overwhelming negativity we face.

If you are interested in working with Dr Lantz Powers send her an email. She is looking for others interested in this concept and bringing it to Nova Scotia Health and IWK.

Try to remember what gives you joy in your work
and enjoy your week

gail

Monday Message, Monday, May 26, 2025

I don't know if many or any of you know who Henry Friesen was-- He died recently. Andre Picard wrote an obituary in the Globe and Mail on May 10 from which I am quoting. An endocrinologist by training he made important discoveries about growth hormone and prolactin. He received numerous awards over his lifetime: the Canada Gairdner International Award, the Gairdner Wightman Award, the Order of Canada and more. He went on to found the Canadian Institutes of Health Research after being president of the Medical Research Council of Canada. He convinced government to double the budget to \$500 M (currently \$ 1.3 billion). He emphasized to government that research funding is an investment in the economy. We need to emphasize that message here in Nova Scotia. Our productivity is one of the lowest in Canada. Investing in research returns huge dividends in productivity not to mention advances in science which further increases the benefit.

Dr Friesen used to quote Ralph Waldo Emerson: " Do not follow where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and make a trail".

This past weekend I had the opportunity to meet another great Canadian who has made global impact. Dr Don Lalonde was recently awarded Professor Emeritus of Dalhousie University. I was able to congratulate him in person and it was wonderful to hear about his journey. He took a common clinical situation- hand surgery and turned the surgical world upside down by doing wide awake surgery instead of using general anesthesia. You may think this is a no-brainer but when Dr Lalonde first started his work this was scoffed at and yet now it is standard of care! The benefits to patients and society are huge. Taking the patient out of the OR allows OR resources and anesthesia to be used for procedures that must be performed under GA. Global Impact!!

I know that most of us will not achieve global impact but it is within our reach to make impact here in Nova Scotia. We owe it to ourselves and our patients to ensure we are keeping up to date with modern advances in our specialty, to not be complacent with doing things the way we have always done-- sometimes doing things the way we learned in residency which for some of us was decades ago! We need to constantly evaluate our own results, question what we do, always look to improve. Good enough has no place in surgery.

Surgeons make an impact every day. It is essential to ourselves and our profession that that impact reflects our best.

And for some of you maybe don't follow the path but make a trail!

Have a great week,

gail