Our hearts go out to everyone in Texas and the Gulf Coast affected by the flooding disaster created by Hurricane Harvey. We have come to know and love the wonderful teams at MD Anderson, Memorial Hermann, Houston Northwest, Harris Health and many more as we’ve worked together on Language of Caring. To everyone impacted by Harvey, we send our prayers for all of you and your families. And, we thank you for your magnanimous and heroic efforts to help others weather this disaster and its aftermath. We at Language of Caring are sending a contribution to the American Red Cross and hope this helps your family, friends and community.

Soapbox- Joy in Medicine: A Personal Journey
By Jeremy Blanchard, MD, MMM, CPE, FACP, FCCP, FACPE; Chief Medical Officer & Coach, Language of Caring, LLC

The Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) recently published an excellent White Paper on improving joy at work for all healthcare professionals (Perlo J, Balik B, Swensen S, Kabcenell A, Landsman J, Feeley D. IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work. IHI White Paper. Cambridge, Massachusetts: IHI; 2017.) Perlo et al. say that, instead of framing our challenge as “reducing burnout” (which is indeed rampant), we should focus on the objective of enhancing JOY. Here is a reflective quote from Don Berwick, MD in the forward of the article:

“What we in the healing professions and its support roles get to do every day touches the highest aspirations of a compassionate civilization. We have chosen a calling that invites people who are worried and suffering to share their stories and allow us to help. If any work ought to give spiritual satisfaction to the workers, this is it. ‘Joy,’ not ‘burnout’, ought to rule the day.”

I couldn’t agree more. In my experience, when doctors reflect on their legacy, they recall moments of impact. Some of my most joyful professional experiences are provided by the times the patient or family felt my team and I really made a difference. I am so honored by this acknowledgement and humbled at the same time. The more such moments of impact come to mind, the more likely the individual is to acknowledge joy they have experienced in their practice of medicine.
Learnings from My Personal Quest for Joy in Practice

The literature on professional burnout cites many etiological factors. Some have to do with laborious systems, bureaucracy, encumbering of electronic medical records, loss of autonomy and a feeling of not being valued. Many of these factors are ones over which the individual physicians feels little control. However, there are factors that we can control and these have to do especially with our own self-management.

As I self-reflected, read, and learned from others, I experimented with techniques entirely within my control - self-management techniques that I have found to be extremely powerful, even though they command little attention in the burnout literature.

One: To experience more joy, become skilled in communicating with empathy. Replace sympathy with empathy.

I’ve been an Intensivist and Critical Care doc for more than 20 years. In my early years, I sometimes found myself fatigued emotionally, not just tired, when I went home. I wasn’t sure if I could bring myself to go to work the next day. I realized I was starting to depersonalize my patients - protecting my heart by distancing myself a bit from my patients’ emotions. I realized I had been “sympathetic” to a fault, absorbing people’s emotions and feeling them strongly myself. As a critical care doc, when a child died in my arms, I felt this intense sadness as if it was my own child. In my view of myself, I saw this as positive, and so did other people - that I could care so much. But, I came to realize that SYMPATHY was not only burning me out; it was also limiting my ability to be objective. I was reaching a point where I couldn’t absorb so much sad emotion and still function with resilience and joy. I realized that I needed to replace sympathy with empathy (see chart below). With empathy, you recognize and acknowledge the patient’s feelings, so you can be compassionate and effective, without becoming paralyzed with emotion. In my own journey, I began to focus on being empathic and my energy and joy increased while enabling me still to show compassion and caring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPATHY</th>
<th>SYMPATHY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You recognize and acknowledge feelings, without feeling them</td>
<td>You feel the person’s pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand your suffering</td>
<td>I feel your pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More is better</td>
<td>A little is okay. A lot clouds judgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy conserving</td>
<td>Energy consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruistic</td>
<td>Egoistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For you: personal growth, career satisfaction</td>
<td>For you: exhaustion, fatigue and burnout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two: To experience more joy, replace Negative Pattern Recognition with Positive Pattern Recognition.

Most of us are trained to focus on negative patterns or flaws. The physician’s role, more than anyone else on the healthcare team, is to find abnormalities. And then, crime busters that we are, we attack, and we get a lot of reinforcement for being saviors and superheroes. This ends up influencing us to hone our recognition of flaws. Inadvertently, this bleeds over into our interactions with colleagues, team members, patients and even our family. We begin to notice and focus on the mistakes and assume negative intent. The adrenaline rush we receive when acutely intervening, or making a difficult diagnosis, is addicting. It becomes too easy to get adrenaline rushes from the recognition of flaws. You can be addicted to adrenaline rushes, and like other addictions they have a negative effect on you.

While many of us have been trained in Negative Pattern Recognition (to see and expect negatives), the good news is that we can retrain ourselves in Positive Pattern Recognition and see our joy in practicing medicine grow by leaps and bounds. We can approach new situations with a focus on the positives. We can process past behavior with a heavy emphasis on the positives. And, when we’re engaged in an interaction - in the moment, we can communicate positive intent and a positive focus to influence positive experiences and results.

Try Positive Pattern Recognition for one month and see your joy grow!
If you’re aware of Negative Pattern Recognition as a habit, consider retraining yourself and feeling the impact on your well-being as a professional.

- **Week 1:** Reflect back. Every night, ask yourself, “*What really good happened in the last 24 hours?*” Do this seven days in a row. It might be hard and feel contrived at first if you’ve been trained to focus on flaws and internalized lines like, “No pain, no gain.”
- **Weeks 2 - 4:** Keep doing this retrospection every day - 3 positives from the day before.

You’re likely to experience some changes over the course of the four weeks.

- Identifying the positives will get increasingly easier.
- In **Week 2,** you’ll catch yourself. You’ll recognize positive moments while they’re happening and file them away for your self-reflection later in the day.
- In **Week 3,** before entering a new interaction, you will predict that it is likely to be one of your positive moments. You will expect it and watch for it.
- In **Week 4,** you’ll expect these moments, notice them and savor them.
- You’ll make more positive things happen.
- You’ll realize there are things about your life you cherish and want to keep.
I was surprised the amount of courage it takes to self-reflect in this manner. But as I investigated more deeply I found these questions were key to my giving this a try:

- Am I finding I am becoming burned out?
- Do I enjoy my practice of medicine as much as I used to?
- Do I find at times the patient is more interesting as a disease rather than a human?
- Do I find myself more frustrated with my team and situation than in the past?

If any of these are yes, what have you got to lose? This is personal, only you need to be aware you are doing this. I ask you if you do it, consider writing the three positive things down. Also write the answers to these questions down and then ask yourself the same questions in 3 weeks and 6 months. Commit to caring for yourself, make appointments to review your, “what if this works” efforts.

What is your walk-up song?
There are certainly difficult forces at play in healthcare that make our work lives challenging. In this article, I’ve discussed two ways we can manage ourselves so we experience greater joy in our work, even in the face of these forces.

In baseball, every player chooses a song that is played as the player approaches their at-bat. Molly Poslesny said, “The most important accessory of baseball, aside from the bats and the gloves, is the walkup song.” Walk-up songs spark the feelings players want to have, so they can become energized and perform at peak. In the early days of practicing medicine, I might have chosen, “One is the Loneliest Number…” But now, knowing the impact of my attitudes and expectations on my results, I choose “Jeremiah was a Bullfrog…” because it makes me smile and feel energetic.

What can you choose as your walk-up song, so you will be inspired by yesterday’s positives and today and tomorrow you can have even more of them?

Practicing Compassion in an Uncompassionate Health System
Dr. Youngson begins this great article with these words: “‘We just don’t have time to care!’ is the heartfelt protest of health workers in every country we visit. This is the reality of modern healthcare – always being asked to do more with less, in a frantic and stress-filled workplace. Health professionals going home exhausted, not with the satisfaction of a job well done but fretting about care too hurried, and patients neglected.

Yet, amidst the storm, some remarkable health professionals create a circle of calm. They go about their work in an unhurried way, finding time to greet their patients, put them at ease, listening deeply and offering kindness and compassion. They don’t neglect their clinical tasks, indeed they seem to get the work done with quiet efficiency. These inspiring workers go home with satisfaction and joy in their hearts. How is that possible?”

He proceeds to identify seven strategies that make a practical difference. He points out that each strategy is a matter of personal choice: “You don’t need permission from your boss or help from your teammates. The same strategies can be applied by the student nurse or the senior doctor, they are universal.”
“Throw kindness around like confetti.”

--Anonymous

Strengthening Our Joy at Work
Goal: Help team members learn more about what’s important to each other, so they can help each other feel more joyful and supported at work.

Instructions:

1. Invite team members to brainstorm on this topic: “To feel greater joy at work, what matters to you?”
2. Write these on a board (or type and display on screen).
3. Then, brainstorm on: “Knowing more about what matters to individuals on our team, what are all the ways we can help each other feel more joy at work?”
4. Ask people to identify ONE action they could personally do or do more of from that list.

“Must be the weather”
The Weather Company and a data analysis center in India are teaming up to explore the connections between health and climatic conditions. They will track how weather patterns relate to local healthcare conditions and the spread of disease. People making healthcare decisions, from the individual to hospitals and large-scale policy-makers such as the Center for Disease Control, may benefit from this knowledge. Click here to read more.

HCAHPS Five Star Ratings Updated
HCAHPS summary of its five-star ratings was updated on the CMS Hospital Compare website in July 2017. Taking into account multiple quality measures, the ratings show how well each hospital performed, on average, compared to other hospitals in the U.S. Click here to read more.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Number of Hospitals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>1203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>1468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★★</td>
<td>543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Best Hospitals to Work At
Indeed looked at all the US hospitals that received at least 50 reviews by current and former employees between July 2015 and June 2017. They crunched the numbers to discover which had the highest average ratings in the category of overall employee experience. The result was a roster of 25 top hospitals. We’re delighted to see Language of Caring clients on this list!
Accountability issues plague and weaken patient experience strategies. In addition, lack of accountability has grave consequences to fellow co-workers, damages the view employees have of their supervisor, and reduces the trust and reliance needed for high levels of collaboration and teamwork. To achieve breakthroughs in the patient experience, we need to establish, communicate and enforce higher standards that will move us from good to consistently GREAT.

In this skill-packed webinar, Dorothy Sisneros and Kimberly Carson describe what it takes to raise the bar on employee performance. They illuminate the leader’s key roles in accountability and share concrete tools you can use to move your employees to a higher level.

**Highlights:**
- Establish, communicate and enforce higher standards with clarity, courage, and conviction
- Verify whether expectations are being met (case examples related to best practices)
- Provide effective performance feedback in a way most likely to be heard
- Raise the bar through coaching conversations with high, middle and low performers
- Handle employee resistance, alibis and excuses with backbone and heart

**WHO SHOULD ATTEND?**
Patient Experience Champions, Executives, Managers, Supervisors, HR Professionals

**WEBINAR FACULTY**

Dorothy Sisneros, M.S., M.B.A.; Partner and SVP-Client Services, Language of Caring

A seasoned executive coach, facilitator, trainer, and strategic partner, Dorothy has extensive experience as a consultant/partner in healthcare, service excellence, leadership, strategic planning, talent management and organizational dynamics. She has coached 100’s of leaders at all levels to excel in their roles and lead effective transformation.

Kimberly Carson, M.Ed.; Director, Client Services and Coach, Language of Caring

Kimberly is a talented, dynamic organizational psychologist. She helps healthcare leaders engage and inspire providers and staff to strengthen processes and practices key to a truly caring culture and consistently excellent medical care. Her expertise includes skilful program design and facilitation, talent management, leadership development and coaching, and organizational development.

**CLICK HERE FOR COMPLIMENTARY REGISTRATION**
Achieve Communication Excellence with Our Patient Experience Solutions

• Web-based training programs that **hardwire** best practice communication skills
• **Proven** CAHPS and patient experience breakthroughs
• Engages and fulfills **Staff and Physicians**

**TO LEARN MORE**

**Attend a Live Webinar Overview** on October 19 or October 24 or **Contact Us**

Join the 200+ organizations who are transforming their cultures with the Language of Caring

**Contact Us!**

314 300 7701

Jill Golde, MS, Dorothy Sisneros, MS, MBA and Wendy Lebov, EdD—partners at Language of Caring,

**Spread the Resources**

• Forward this month’s HeartBeat email to others.
• Share and tweet the following link:
  
  Joy in Medicine: A Personal Journey
  

**Join our LinkedIn Group “Patient Experience & Communication”** and add to the rich discussions.

**PLEASE FOLLOW US!**

Language of Caring

Achieving an unparalleled patient experience and a culture of caring through exceptional communication.