

VMG COVID-19 UPDATE

Wednesday, May 20, 2020

Issue # 47

Good afternoon. It's my oldest son's birthday today and my one year old grandson's birthday was yesterday. So I started the day in good times. But then, thoughts turn to the news of the day and it's easy to get a bit lost.

When I find myself in times of trouble
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be
And in my hour of darkness
She is standing right in front of me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be

Most of you, I hope, will recognize this as the lyric to *Let it Be* by the Beatles. I never knew the source or inspiration for the song. I had assumed it was vaguely religious. But it turns out that Paul McCartney had a dream and his mother, Mary (who died when he was 14), told him that despite his worries and concerns, things would be OK and just go on with your life. He was comforted by this (and of course the song did pretty well, too). Good to think on.

I think this is the position a lot of our patients are in: *Troubled, times of darkness*. Certainly many are *broken hearted*, having experienced a loss of family, friends, hope, etc. And don't forget confusion. There's lots of that as we try to evaluate what we hear from the news, politicians, scientists and pundits. We all want certainty, even those of us who like roller coasters.

Charles Duhigg, writing in *The New Yorker* recently, talks about the role of epidemiologists in these times. He says "epidemiology is a science of possibilities **and persuasion** not of certainties or hard truth. Quoting the Scottish epidemiologist, John Cowden, "being approximately right most of the time is better than being precisely right occasionally." "You can only be sure when to act in retrospect." Duhigg says epidemiologists must persuade people to upend their lives – forgo travel and socializing, submit themselves to blood draws and immunization shots (not yet)—even when there's scant evidence that they're directly at risk." That's our job too.

The CDC, in better times, planned for how to handle epidemics. It turns out that in addition to the science, *in times of trouble*, communication is key. One of most important things in the playbook is to have one person in charge of the message and the message is what they call a SOHCO (sock-O) which stands for Single, Overriding, Health Communication Objective. The Field Manual for the CDC says that it should be repeated at the beginning and end of every communication with the public. It's important to have a message, to express empathy with people's confusion and concerns, acknowledge what we know and what we don't know and be as transparent as possible. That's how persuasion should work. This is the business we are all now in.

So keep thinking not just about the clinical care but also about the messages we need to send, expressing empathy for the confusion everyone feels, and tell folks what we know and what we don't know. They are looking for *words of wisdom*. You can help a lot just by being there! That's what gets me in a better mood. *Let it be*.

National, State, and Regional

The national scene remains chaotic with lots of opening up in many different directions. We're going to learn a lot from these "natural experiments" within weeks.

The state seems to have stabilized with hospitalizations going down as well as deaths. Much of this has been achieved by physical/social distancing and good hand hygiene and wearing masks and staying at home when sick. However many people are still concerned that we are going too fast given that this is a new virus, there is no treatment and no vaccine. With the state beginning a phased reopening we'll soon have a sense of what happens. An article in today's *Boston Globe* by Jenee Osterheldt suggests that Congresswoman Presley has been saying that "opening the state could close more caskets." And communities of color and lower economic status have been doubly harmed by the pandemic; medically with greater death rates and hospitalizations and, economically (loss of jobs and support programs). She is calling for slowing down until we have better social and economic supports to help all citizens be able to stay at home when necessary, social distance, stay out of crowds, etc.

Memorial Day weekend is upon us and we may soon find out if even this slow, phased plan is too fast. In the meantime, we need to keep with the things that have begun to bring the deaths and hospitalizations down: social/physical distancing, frequent hand washing, wearing masks, don't touch the face, staying out of larger gatherings, staying home if sick, etc. Please talk with family and friends about observing these reasonable precautions. The virus is not taking a holiday.

At VMG

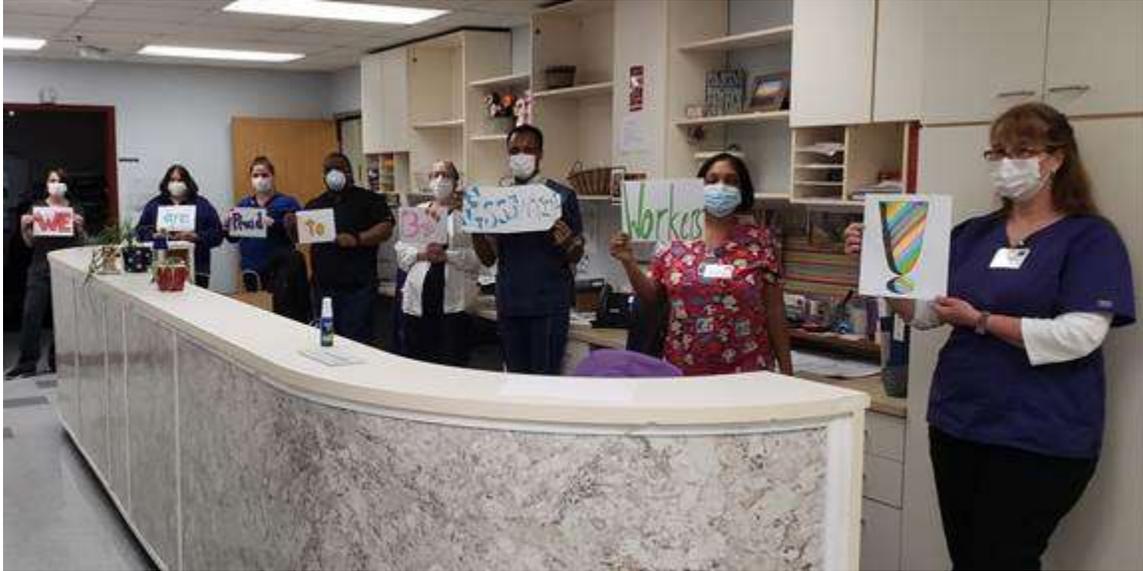
We are working on expanding our "Outdoor Office" initiative to reduce the chance of exposure and **keep us all (patients, staff, practitioners) as safe as possible while providing important and needed care**. That is our SOHCO.

We are "continuing to begin" to work on expanding services, slow and steady, to get back to most of the things our patients and practitioners need in a manner that is efficient and as safe as possible. We won't jump ahead until we are reasonably certain it's safe and in all our best interests. You'll hear more about this in the coming weeks.

Val Felton and Amy Rice continue to work on acquiring and maintaining the right PPE for current services and for expanded services, when we get to them.

In the meantime, consistent with the Governor's reopening plan beginning with Phase One on Tuesday, you will see signs posted on our entrances telling patients that we have met requirements for hygiene protocols, social distancing, training of staff and practitioners, and cleaning and disinfecting. If anyone gets an email or request from a state agency to sign a document about the above, please forward it to me ASAP.

OK, we're heading for the weekend soon. I want you to see a photo of some of our clinical staff at AMC with a message to our patients and to all of us. We appreciate all your essential work. This is what helps to get us through. Here you go:



Finally, here's James Corden and a surprise guest, in case you haven't seen it before. Watch it through to the end (it's a little long so you may want to watch this at home).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjvzCTqkBDQ>

Once again, and this remains so important, please wash your hands (a lot), don't touch your face, maintain social/physical distancing (it works), wear a mask, and continue to be in touch with and take care of each other.

Be well,

Joel

Be patient; be mindful

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