

# **Find Your Emotional Equilibrium**

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# Emotional equilibrium

## ■ Aequanimitas – Sir William Osler

- “In the physician or surgeon, no quality takes rank with imperturbability...coolness and presence of mind, calmness amid storm, clearness of judgment in moments of grave peril...”
- “The physician needs a clear head and a kind heart; his work is arduous and complex, requiring the exercise of the very highest faculties of the mind, while constantly appealing to the emotions and finer feelings.”

# Emotional Connection Continuum

■ Where do you fall?

■ Where would you *like* to fall?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

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Emotional  
Disconnection

Emotional  
Center

Emotional  
Overinvolvement

# Centering

- Found in both Christian and Buddhist contemplative traditions
- Can have a secular basis as well
- Groundedness
- Presence/mindfulness
- Calmness
  - Not detached
  - Loving, caring, compassionate

# Coming back to Center

- Pause: Don't just do something – stand there
- Take a breath
- Say a prayer, quote a wisdom saying
- Be curious, not furious
  - devastated, panicked, helpless etc.
- Soften your heart
- Broaden your perspective
  - When you look back from the perspective of tomorrow, what do you need to do to feel good about how you acted today?

# Coming back to Center

- You are aware of your emotions BUT...
- You are not driven by your emotions
- Your emotions occur within a larger context of doing good for the other (your patient) and for yourself
- However you act
  - With firmness
  - With gentleness
  - Some combination of the two
- You have found a still, trustworthy center

# Cultivating Positive Emotions/Attitudes in Patient Care

■ **Some positive emotions/attitudes we need to draw on with patients/colleagues/family/friends**

– Patience

– Kindness

– Caring

– Joy

– Humility

- Respect

- Compassion

- Altruism

- Service



# Cultivating Positive Emotions/Attitudes

## ■ Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.:

- “...*blessing life is about filling yourself up so that your blessings overflow onto others.*” (My Grandfather’s Blessings, 2000)
- Compassion and caring should overflow from our brimming reservoir of joy and love, rather than feeling like we’re constantly scraping the bottom of our barrel to find the last remnants of these qualities.



# Some strategies for cultivating positive emotions/attitudes

- **Awareness of negative “leakage”**
  - **Accept your emotions without shame or blame**
  - **Interrupt the pattern**
  - **Decide how you’d like to be feeling**
- **Practice gratitude**
  - **Find something to appreciate in the situation**

# Cultivating positive emotions/attitudes

- **Adopt the other's perspective**
  - You may not want to open Pandora's box,  
**BUT REMEMBER**
  - the patient has to live in that box
- **Remember the other is someone's mother, father, sister, brother**
- **Change the story you tell about the other**
- **Practice commonalities**
  - Look for what you share in common with the other, rather than what divides you
- **Respect difference**
  - Learn to be comfortable with differences: in values, behavior, priorities
- **Try to see the divine in everyone you meet**
- **Mini-metta (lovingkindness) meditation**

# Cultivating positive emotions/attitudes

- Remember something that brings you joy
  - Now remember something else
  - Something else
- Cue your core values
  - What would my role-model do in this situation?
- Keep a daily gratitude journal
- Contemplate something in nature
- Go to newborn nursery
- Take care of yourself

# Translational Applications

## ■ Contextual:

- Let your positive emotions/attitudes suffuse your being

## ■ Behavioral:

- Express your positive emotion/attitude toward the other in words
  - Language of understanding, empathy
  - Language of comfort, reassurance
- Express your positive emotion/attitude toward the other in deeds
  - Smile
  - Gesture of comfort, reassurance, affection