

November 6, 2008

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

The endless election is finally over. And whether your candidates won or lost, one thing is certain. While we all are hopeful that new leaders will bring new opportunities, the reality is that our economic and personal challenges will take time to solve. But solve them we must and will.

That means we need to get used to one unwelcome phenomenon as a continuing part of our lives: **STRESS**. The questions for each of are: “*How can I control it?*” or “*How can I stop it?*”

Unfortunately, stress is all around us, personally and professionally. Each day, we are inundated with volumes of new information, much of it confusing or contradictory. We experience increased demands on our time. Our financial concerns grow. Add to that the issues of family well-being, and ... well, you get the picture.

So in this post-election *Straight Talk*, I'd like to focus on what we can do daily to cope with stress—to help ourselves, our families, colleagues, and those we serve. If we can find some tranquility, we will not only be more effective helping others, but also have more satisfaction in everything we do.

- First, do your homework. A great way to begin to deal with stress is retrieving and analyzing the facts before reaching a decision. This Dale Carnegie principle can be applied to personal concerns as well as professional ones. Without looking into the “facts,” we often let our imaginations take us to the “worst-case scenario,” rather than the most likely or best outcome. Medically speaking, having correct information and formulating a plan with reasonable expectations can save a lot of sleepless nights, nail-biting, weight gain, alcohol consumed and wrinkle lines.
- Second, stay productive. Moaning about your lot in life won't solve anything. But directing at least part of your time and energy to work and recreation will help enormously. Working hard and playing hard are equally important in my mind. The sense of accomplishment one gets from helping a patient, colleague, family member or even a stranger can be huge. I'm talking about something as simple as helping with directions to something as dramatic as curing an illness or stopping a heart attack. Smiling, making eye contact, extending a warm greeting may all sound trivial—but help both the giver and receiver. On a personal level, we are all fortunate to work here at NCH and in a field as fulfilling as healthcare. We have access to courses in a variety of areas to stimulate mental acuity and a Wellness Center for physical activity. These facilities are available to all of us, and we should use them to balance our lives.
- Third, speaking of “*balance*”—work/life balance, as difficult as it is to manage in contemporary society, is nonetheless critical to reduce stress. We all seem tethered to our handhelds and cell phones. We can easily get overwhelmed by one business activity or another. Here we should all take a lesson from the young families with two working spouses or families headed by a single parent. These parents have real time constraints. But typically, they understand the importance of “balancing” work with family. The key is to learn to savor whatever you are doing at the time, be it work or family or recreation. When you enjoy your work, it morphs into a satisfying experience in all aspects of your life. So if you don't like work—and I understand there are some who don't—then find something that you like to do.

The point is that life is too short to add even more stress. Be positive about our future. I have always believed that what you anticipate happening will happen.

Respectfully,



Allen S. Weiss, M.D.