



Who Cares for the Health Care Provider?

by Greg Risberg, M.S.W.

Oncology care providers speak of being stressed and under pressure in today's changing health care environment. To reduce stress, you need to be more relaxed and communicate more effectively. Here are six easy steps to follow.

1. Notice your self-talk and try to keep it p_____.

If you answered "private," you're probably under a lot of stress! The correct answer is "positive." Although being optimistic is sometimes hard, imagine how different you might feel with a few pats on your back. If you are prone to saying, "I'll never finish all this paperwork," change your attitude by saying, "I'll do what I can, and I'll make some headway." Instead of saying, "No one here appreciates my efforts," say, "I can see that what I just did helped that patient." If we try to be more positive, feel more positive, and act more positive, we'll feel better overall.

2. Laugh at least 24 times a day for good health.

Laughter can chase away the blues, lift our spirits, and reduce stress. To increase the laughter and humor in your life, read the comics daily, share funny stories with others, and watch people around you. Funny things are happening all the time!

If that doesn't work, watch yourself and what you say or do! I

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always keep a notebook with me and write down funny things I see, hear about, or do myself. Wouldn't reading a "Humor Record" uplift you more than all the other forms, charts, and records that you have to read? Include patients, too! Ask them, "Anything funny happen to you recently?" They know humor is good medicine.

3. Take some time for yourself.

Most people who choose the health care profession have "giving" personalities. They put themselves last and take care of everyone else first.

One nurse, who liked to bake, recently told me, "I feel like what I give to my patients and co-workers is fresh-baked bread—the best of me—but my family and friends only get the leftovers." I asked her, "Well, what's left for you after all that?" She replied, "Nothing."

You need to take some time for yourself, even if it's only a few minutes. Is there a quiet place you can go to on a break—a small garden, a chapel, a park near your hospital? Can you renew yourself there?

4. Keep an Accomplishment List.

We all have "to do" lists, and when we die, our lists will still be there—still unfinished.

What do you imagine people will say about you at your funeral? Will they say, "Boy, there was a lot of stuff she never finished before she died," or will they talk about all the things that you accomplished, day after day?

I suggest you keep an Accomplishment List! Write down three, four, or eight things that you've accomplished *each day*, and see if it doesn't help you to feel better.

5. Keep things in perspective.

Remember the two-part adage. Rule #1: Don't sweat the small stuff. Rule #2: Remember, it's all small stuff.

I don't agree that everything is small stuff, but a lot of what frustrates us won't seem so important if we compare it to what really matters.

Ask yourself, what is truly important? You probably would list family and friends, ways that you make vital contributions to your work and your community, and pastimes that give you outlets for your deepest interests or provide fun and challenge.

In contrast, much of what throws us off-balance is "small stuff"—a grumpy co-worker, a crabby patient, a coffee pot that no one refilled. If we imagine our frustrations as newspaper headlines, it might help to keep them in perspective. For example, imagine this as the headline of your local newspaper: "Nurse Loses Parking Lot Space by 2.4 Seconds!" Things could be worse!

6. Find hope wherever you can.

Children, family and friends, a new day, a small step forward in achieving a goal, our religion or faith—all these can give us hope. Did you know that every state in the U.S. except Hawaii has a city called Hope?

What gives you hope? If you remind yourself of the sources of hope in your life, then you'll be able to use these to uplift yourself when you feel discouraged. Look for hope *every day*—it's there, though it's sometimes hard to find. ☺