



# View from the Pyramids: Shaping our Future by Embracing Adaptability

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## EDITORIAL

Unprecedented” is a word that has been used far too much in the past two years, but here we are again in another “unprecedented” time. We continue to break records, while breaking spirits of those who carry the heaviest burdens on their backs. Omicron COVID variant has challenged hospital care with “over capacity” status, burdening ERs and sickening essential workers. Higher education academic institutions have seen declining enrollments of 5.1% as compared to pre-pandemic data.<sup>1</sup> One in 5 healthcare workers have left healthcare entirely since March of 2020.<sup>2</sup> While these numbers and facts are daunting, I would propose we focus less on these challenges and more on how we move into the next generation by embracing adaptability.

We have the power to change the way we do things, to shape our future and to bring balance back into a profession that has been notorious for lacking in balance. We have this power, but only if we recognize and have language to understand what is needed in our lives.

Many have moved beyond “stressed” into the territory of “overwhelmed.” In author Brene Brown’s words, “Overwhelm means and extreme level of stress, an emotional and or cognitive intensity to the point of feeling unable to function.”<sup>3</sup>

While much has been written about physicians’ being infamously poor at following their own advice, now more than ever, that fact has to change. In Brown’s book “Atlas of the Heart,” she states the only way through overwhelm is to “step aside” from it for a brief moment and take time away from the situation causing the overwhelm. Take time to de-escalate the emotions and find that balance again. If we ignore the overwhelm, as is typically the case in medicine, decision making becomes compromised.

I am suggesting that we choose resilience BEFORE the overwhelm. This requires that we begin with self-care, and there is absolutely no shame in this. I am not suggesting we give up all empathy towards others in order to find empathy for ourselves. Rather, that the two do not need to be mutually exclusive or contrary thoughts. Adaptability means we can accomplish both, holding true to “be mindful always of my great responsibility to preserve the health and the life of my patients,”<sup>4</sup> as dictated by our Osteopathic Oath, while preserving our own sanity, health and welfare at the same time. The two do not need to be enemies, and AT Still would not have wanted them to be.

So here is what adaptability means to me and how we as a profession move forward:

We have to recognize that the complexity of our health care environment has changed. Patients are sicker and more complicated, while at the same time, doctors are intersecting with “COVID fatigue,” staffing challenges, and feeling a loss of control.



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- 1 | Putting down the superhero cape we wear and recognizing our own needs in addition to those of others.
- 2 | Giving ourselves time and permission to process what is happening around us, rather than just powering through it and shelving it for later.
- 3 | Making a commitment to work on our OWN health, not just the health and wellbeing of our patients, students or family.
- 4 | Doing things differently, even if “breaks with tradition” of how things have been done. Many of the traditions needed to change, and adaptability is the “way through” that change.
- 5 | Seeing fewer patients in the day, or recognizing the need for mental wellness days.
- 6 | Understanding we are no good to our patients, family, students if we are already “running on fumes” or already in a state of “overwhelm.”
- 7 | Committing to the importance of environment; finding fresh air when possible and seeking solace in the beauty around us, or if not possible, refreshing your own indoor environments.
- 8 | Regulating our own internal disposition.
- 9 | Knowing our limits.

Educationally we are having to juggle safety and risk while still delivering the best curriculum possible, requiring multiple changes back and forth between in person and virtual. Many physicians were “burned out” prior to the pandemic, and the pandemic became the icing on the burnout cake, so to speak. Navigating this “new normal” is exhausting, but an opportunity as well.

Supporting each other by recognizing overwhelm in each other and not normalizing it is a great first step.

So commit to a new way of “being” by adapting and embracing change...both personally and professionally. Stop normalizing the state of being overwhelmed and begin to have language to talk about it and heal it. Offering grace to others instead of blame. Never be ashamed that you are less of a doctor for needing to care for yourself. Medicine needs to collectively let go of that concept. We will be all the more resilient for it, and will make our profession better in the process.

In Gratitude,

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