

NOT ENOUGH SAID: CANDID CONVERSATIONS ABOUT LIFE AND MEDICINE

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We recognize that these thoughts are only a fraction of what is being experienced, felt, and pondered. There is, indeed, *Not Enough Said*, and would love to hear from each of you. How are you feeling? What inspires you? How can we make sense of this crisis and how can the members of our community best support each other?

Write us a Letter to the Editor, or **email us** at: notenoughsaidhospitalist@gmail.com

Images of healthcare workers during the COVID-19 crisis by Chinese artists in the Lancang Lahu Autonomous County of Pu'er City.



REAL TALK: FUEL TO KEEP THE FIRE FROM BURNING OUT

On the Question of Loneliness

By Julie Jackson-Murphy

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Sometimes we’re drawn to things without a specific purpose in mind. Sometimes you’re just living into a question, years or even eras between the moment when it was first posed, and its answer is revealed. I dropped out of college after the first semester because I didn’t have the money to afford it. I was just there because they told us that’s what we were supposed to do anyway. Finding an answer to what to do felt like an insurmountably lonely experience. So, I worked and later felt compelled to take classes I could afford in math and science and abnormal psychology at community college when I could. I needed to learn something from others, and expand my way of thinking, and test myself. That felt like something I should be doing.

Those classes eventually added up to enough to allow me to transfer to a university, where I was inexplicably drawn to study English. Words felt like something I should be exploring, through some framework forcing me to make connections worthy of expressing. In the many years that followed of working and living, that need to explore and express and connect must have been more apparent than I was able to see, as disparate souls in unexpected places, planted a seed that Medicine could be an answer to a question I did not realize I must have been asking. And I headed in a new direction, drawn yet again to something I could not see but only felt I should be doing.

I look back at U-turns, and missteps, and disappointments, and fears, and those inexplicable forces that connect us and give rise to questions. I see answers that don’t fall so neatly into the multiple choices, but rather somewhere between the lines. This fabric of our destiny is always against a backdrop of uncertainty. Try as we may to make it precise and predictable, it eludes us. And that is a frightening prospect. As frightening as the fear visited upon us now, which can make us feel incredibly lonely.

The questions perhaps have always been an invitation to acknowledge the irony of how lonely you can feel even while being surrounded by so many others and how strange it feels to try to settle into discomfort as a way of finding comfort. To find others who see what you cannot yet see, hold the calm you cannot yet hold, and imagine possibilities with words you cannot yet imagine, is how we find supportive therapy for loneliness.

The volume is turned way up all around us, yet it feels very quiet. It feels like our inner lives have been brought to the foreground by some force we can’t see but can only feel. We are attuned a little differently, seeing the world laid bare, stripped down to its essentials. What we say and how we say it seem to matter more. Common greetings seem more sincere. And the spaces formerly filled with small talk, have been enlarged by social distancing, creating more space for real talk. Filling the lonely spaces for each other. That feels like an answer to a question of what we should be doing.



REAL TALK: FUEL TO KEEP THE FIRE FROM BURNING OUT

To Bless the Space Between Us

By Anna Von

During a week that felt like a monsoon bringing wave upon wave of breaking news and whipping my emotions around with gale-force winds, I found myself wishing that Irish poet John O'Donahue was alive to gift us some wisdom. His poetry anthology-slash-"book of blessings" called (fittingly) *To Bless the Space Between Us* is a treasure trove of insight, imparting encouragement and wisdom for specific life events. As I read the multiple daily update emails this week, I wanted to reach out to all of our colleagues in this time of crisis. I decided I'd have to work on a blessing myself. With much less wisdom but a lot of care, here goes.

To Medical Providers in a Time of Pandemic

May you sense the fellowship of an ancient host of caregivers who have
stood forward to touch the suffering and
stood up against the formidable foes of sickness and injury.

When you walk through eerie halls and see another human
cleaning the floors or
pushing a stretcher or
putting on a face mask,
may you gain strength from their comradeship.

May you allow burdens of guilt to fall away
and be freed to perform
each task
each day
with joy and purpose.

As you look into the eyes of the ill and see fear, may you have the stamina to give them a gift:
the gift of a shared burden,
an honest conversation;
for in the hospital, time and talk are love.

When fear seizes your own focus
and the ground is unmoored
and the walls sway and crumble
may you look outside of yourself
to accept love from unexpected places
and find hope in sacred truths.

When your strength is sapped and the smallest decision is too much and your thoughts are blunted and tears burn in your eyes, may you be given rest.

When grief engulfs you, may you reach into the darkness and find love to hold on to.

May you share space on the lifeboats with hope and companionship,
see each other with compassion and solidarity,
and recognize grace in small moments.

May we bless the space between us.



BIG TALK: SMALL TALK'S OLDER, COOLER SIBLING

In times of crisis, we look to our leaders. We are appreciative that the leader we get to look to is Dan Hunt, Emory's Hospital Medicine Division Director. Between the many demands on his time, he graciously agreed to a candid heart-to-heart about how he's feeling during this stressful time:

Perhaps now more than ever in the current era, the collective feelings of uncertainty, risk, and exposure that Brené Brown uses to define vulnerability are defining our daily lives. Is there a strategy you've found helpful to handle your vulnerable moments?

Although I probably tend toward a state of denial during periods of uncertainty, risk, and exposure, the reality of what we're facing right now is puncturing my denial bubble. So I take solace in some degree of routine both on a personal level and professionally. And I try to forgive myself if I freak out a little (or a lot) and say the wrong thing or am more emotional than perhaps is appropriate for the level of stress.

Life, as it is currently reminding us, has a way of putting things in their proper place. Is there something that you may have been struggling to prioritize that you're strangely having an easier time doing now?



Strangely enough, I think I've been doing a little better with exercise the past few weeks, hitting the elliptical machine at home 4-5 times per week. Maybe it's the seriousness of the situation and a feeling that I need to be in better shape to deal with the stress and the coming physical demands on us. Then again, I'm not exactly reducing my cookie and Fritos consumption, so there's still room for prioritizing better.

"An inescapable network of mutuality" is how Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to our relation to each other. You have family across the country and in other countries. How are you maintaining that network of mutuality during this time?

As our middle daughter (the Austin kindergarten teacher) might react, "that's quite the SAT word you slipped into the conversation" right there. Could I look up mutuality and get back to you? But seriously, we're talking and we're texting. A lot. And our youngest daughter came home from New York earlier this week since her classes are now exclusively online and her three roommates left town. And being home with her parents may be better than being alone in a locked-down New York. My wife is communicating via Facebook with her relatives in Iceland. And I think it's important to be in the online conversation with my network of friends and colleagues around the country learning from each other and offering support.



Fearless leader and his fearless Viking Dog, Gracie



My dad, Rosa, and Nikki



Hunt daughters

Dan's loved ones: Pictures from the Hunt family photo album

BIG TALK: SMALL TALK'S OLDER, COOLER SIBLING

What do you go to sleep worried about? I worry about family and how everyone is coping. I worry about the members of our division staying safe and doing well in this crisis. Interestingly enough, my usual worries about budgets, academic deadlines, and major presentations have pretty much faded away. I hope that's temporary.



What do you wake up hopeful about? I wake up hopeful that today will be a great day. That we'll acquit ourselves well as a division caring for patients in need of us. That I'll have a chance to contribute in some meaningful way.

Most people who encounter you would probably describe you as one of the calmer individuals they've met. Were you born that way? Are you from a family of calm people? Is there a philosophy that underlies that calm demeanor? Was I born calm? I was born on April 1st, Easter Sunday, and reportedly breech. And the doctor told my father that things might not be easy in the delivery. So, I'm sure I was calm throughout. ☺ My father seemed to have a volcanic temper but perhaps I'm selectively remembering his exasperation with my brother and me as he was trying to teach us the finer points of boxing out for rebounds, shooting free throws, moving the feet on defense, etc. I think he used up a lot of his calm in his jobs as a chemist experimenting with rocket fuels for Polaris missiles and subsequently as a college chemistry professor dealing with organic chemistry students who would take a flask full of burbling, fuming chemicals out of the laboratory hood and into his office to ask a question. My mother was the calm one in the family, so it's likely any calm genetic traits I inherited are on the X chromosome. I'm not sure I have a philosophy that underlies a supposed calm demeanor, but I find it important to maintain calm for others and I guess that's an extension of a service attitude. And then there's a question that I've been pondering for a long time. Ken Mattox, a great trauma surgeon at Ben Taub General Hospital in Houston, used to say "go to the heart of chaos, for there you will find calm". And that has perplexed me to the point that maybe it's become a mantra of sorts in times of stress.

What's the most preposterous conspiracy theory you've heard about COVID-19? Well, Julie and Anna, I don't watch a lot of FOX TV, so I'm really not up on the COVID-19 conspiracy theories. Although the list of preposterous proclamations I've heard coming from the White House press briefings of late (y'all know the source I'm talking about) aggravate me more than enough.

You find out your neighbors are selling toilet paper by the roll from a shed out back at ten times the market price. Do you:

- A. Have your wife distract them while you break into the shed Mission Impossible-style, steal the toilet paper, then deliver it to a shelter or;
- B. Distract them yourself while your wife does the breaking in?

Interesting question. I like A although could I suggest a modified Mission Impossible approach? I'd approach the neighbors' shed with a huge wad of counterfeit bills (I've seen too many *Good Girls* episodes lately), offer them twenty times the market price, drop that wad of bills on them, insist on a receipt, and then donate the toilet paper to a local homeless shelter. Oh, but we're not done yet.....I'd be sure to alert the FBI to a suspicion that the neighbors might be passing counterfeit Jacksons. And just for good measure, I'd drop a 1099-MISC on them (and the IRS) for next year's tax season.



Too risky you say? Okay, let's try B. Did I mention that my wife is Icelandic? A Viking. I'm imagining an approach that includes a battle axe, a platoon of berserkers following in her wake, and a fire-breathing dragon. Trust me, this will not go well for the neighbors. And I'm not sure a distraction will be required although having the dragon vaporize the main house on the way to the shed would be a nice touch, don't you think?

Okay, time to vote.....A or B?

BIG TALK: SMALL TALK'S OLDER, COOLER SIBLING



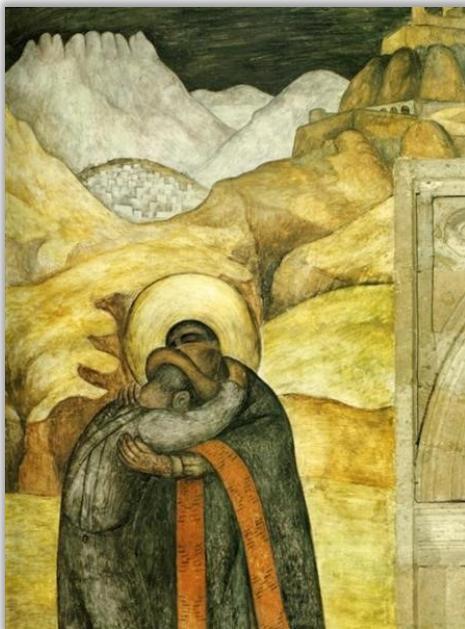
When you walk on to the imaginary stage of your bathroom, living room, or car, the audience is charged up and waiting for you, and the band starts getting into it, what song is your first number?

U2. Beautiful Day.



The existential dilemma of balancing freedom vs responsibility is kicking us all in the tail right now. Is there a freedom you're not that upset about having had to give up?

I guess I don't feel as guilty about not making it to Atlanta professional sporting or cultural events. But I'm promising myself that I'll make it to an Atlanta United match after COVID-19 disappears.



We've taken to compiling a list of all the good things that could come out of this crisis. What's a good thing you imagine could come from this that will last once we've recovered?

We'll come to realize that we NEED each other and we'll appreciate the beautiful, affirming significance of a hug freely given and freely accepted.



Lauren Powers

Not Enough Said: Candid Conversations About Life and Medicine

We're excited to hear your voices in upcoming issues, knowing that there are many among us with a lot to add and wonderful ways to say it. The more stories we tell, dilemmas we raise, and experiences we share, the better this project will be. We look forward to your contributions.

Email us at notenoughsaidhospitalist@gmail.com for:

- Letters to the Editor
- Real Talk fuel you want us to add to the fire
- Satisfaction Distractions making you happy
- Your frustrating Great Question

Your Editors,

Anna and Julie



Anna, David, Micah & Kathryn

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Lauren Powers makes magic happen every month, ensuring that all the deep thoughts and interests we choose to share get delivered beautifully and accessibly. We are grateful for you and all you do Lauren.

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Julie Jackson-Murphy is a Hospitalist at the Atlanta VA and **Anna Von** is at Emory University Hospital. When not reading a slew of other books not assigned for her book club, Julie can be found hoping that book club is another thing that gets postponed by the Rona. Anna, when not channeling Irish poets, can be found trying to channel Laura Ingalls Wilder in a one-room schoolhouse for a 4th-grader and a 2nd-grader.



Julie and Kevin

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