



HeartBeat

ON THE QUALITY PATIENT EXPERIENCE™

Insights, tips, tools and resources to help you achieve the unparalleled patient, family and employee experience



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Soapbox: Caring Doesn't Just FEEL Good—It DOES Good!

By Wendy Leebov Ed.D., Partner & Founder, Language of Caring, LLC

We all know the importance of compassionate care, that it nourishes the person on the giving and the receiving end. What many people don't realize is the extent to which caring affects the heart—literally. I'm talking about the physical organ, not a symbolic concept.



I recently came across research from HeartMath® Institute which describes a “dynamic, ongoing, two-way dialogue” between our hearts and brains in generating emotions.

J. Andrew Armour, a leading neuro-cardiologist on HMI's Scientific Advisory Board, found the heart contains cells that synthesize and release feel-good hormones such as dopamine and norepinephrine. The resulting positive emotions don't just make us feel better—they improve our health in tangible ways.



Intrigued, I looked further into the issue and found an **article** in the *Journal of Advancement in Medicine* on the medical benefits of compassionate caring. When study participants experienced care and compassion for just five minutes, their bodies significantly increased the secretion of antibodies described as the “first line of defense” against pathogens in the respiratory, gastrointestinal and urinary systems. In contrast, the control group of

people who experienced frustration and anger had suppressed levels of these essential antibodies—and this effect lasted up to five hours! This means that even a brief act of caring can actually reduce the likelihood of infection and illness. Other research by HeartMath shows that positive emotions resulting from acts of caring regulate the heart's rhythm, boost the immune system, and help with a range of health issues such as pain, hypertension, depression, sleep disorders and more.

Caring is good for the giver as well. Engaging in acts of caring increases our level of oxytocin, the “love hormone” involved in producing feelings of happiness and empathy. For its role in attraction, reproduction, birth and breastfeeding, oxytocin has been dubbed by some researchers “the great facilitator of life”. It has recently been discovered that oxytocin is produced in the heart as well as in the brain, and that concentrations of it are found in the heart.





“We must be cautious of the pitfall of ‘overcare’.”

This reinforces what we already knew intuitively: genuine care nourishes both the giver and receiver. Caring and compassion make a soothing tonic for someone who is feeling scared or vulnerable. Each and every time we choose to care for someone, we improve their health and our own—physically as well as emotionally.

At the same time, our capacity to give care is not infinite. We must be cautious of the pitfall of ‘overcare’. Caregivers should watch for signs of anxiety, guilt, anger or feeling drained. Becoming too attached to achieving a certain result can lead to crushing disappointment. Focusing our caring attention exclusively in one area can lead to neglect in others. We must choose to care for ourselves as well.

I encourage each of us to consider how and where we can express caring—for our families, neighbors, community, human family, our planet and all the life on it. How can we increase that caring, or make it more strongly felt? Although it’s easy to feel overwhelmed by the pain wracking our world, we can gain strength by recognizing and remembering the real, tangible impacts which even brief acts of caring produce. Those seemingly small acts of caring will inspire others. In this way we create an ever-expanding cycle of compassion that will serve as the first line of defense against suffering, and provide a surge in love and empathy—the greatest facilitators of life.



I invite you to read more about the transformative power of caring in HeartMath’s new book: ***Heart Intelligence: Connecting with the Intuitive Guidance of the Heart*** by Doc Childre, Deborah Rozman, Rollin McCraty, and Howard Martin. It describes how the physical heart is linked to the spiritual/energetic heart, and how we can use ‘heart intelligence’ to improve our physical and emotional health.





Five minutes of experiencing a positive emotion has proven health benefits (see Soapbox). Give yourself the luxury of letting positive emotions—gratitude, appreciation, love—wash over you. Savor a pleasant memory. Allow yourself to soak in a bath of pleasant feelings for a full five minutes. You'll return to your workday refreshed.



Workplace stress is contagious; one frantic coworker can upset the energy of the entire team. Positive energy can be shared as well. At the beginning of a meeting, take a moment to consciously create a positive collective mood. Ask each participant to focus on an emotion such as gratitude, appreciation or compassion. Picture that emotion radiating throughout the room, touching each person in it.



Results of the **2016 Survey of America's Physicians** are in! A few highlights:

- **43%** of physicians have at least some of their pay tied to quality or value.
- About **27%** of physicians do not accept Medicare patients or limit the number of Medicare patients they treat.
- Only **20%** are familiar with the 2015 Medicare Accountability and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA) which regulates payment for treating Medicare patients.
- **38%** say that Electronic Health Records have little or no impact on the quality of care in their practice.
- **28%** say they are overextended and overworked.
- Despite all the difficulties, **72%** said they would choose to be a doctor all over again.

Source: *2016 Survey of America's Physicians: Practice Patterns & Perspectives*, conducted by Merritt Hawkins for the Physicians Foundation.



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Jill Golde, MS, Dorothy Sisneros, MS, MBA and Wendy Leebov, EdD—partners at Language of Caring.

Spread the Resources

- Forward this month's HeartBeat email to others.
- Share and tweet the following link:
Caring Doesn't Just FEEL Good—It DOES Good!

<http://languageofcaring.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/caring-doesnt-just-feel-good-it-does-good.pdf>

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