

In the Journey, Choose Joy

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It's the start of 2025, and if you are like many of us, those well-meaning resolutions have already been forgotten. The ongoing challenges and opportunities in medical education live on. These include the new residency core outcomes, with the more intentional shift to a competency-based medical education framework¹ and the rapid growth of artificial intelligence.^{2,3} When facing such major developments, we sometimes feel helplessness and inadequacy.⁴ It is tempting to give into the graveyard of work stress and lose sight of the garden of interests and passions. In the face of life's difficulties, we get to choose our response. This opportunity for choice can bring hope and optimism into what might otherwise be overwhelmingly challenging.

I (V.W.) recently completed a bittersweet relocation away from a wonderful clinic and department so that I can better journey with my father through the stages of dementia. As I was unpacking my belongings and thinking about what was left behind and what lies ahead, I spotted a keepsake box covered with the phrase “Choose Joy.” In the face of change and new circumstances, what a fantastic idea, to choose joy. In this issue of Family Medicine, you will see examples of ways to choose joy by resting, reframing, and refocusing.

REST

Rest in and on your strengths and lean into the strengths of others around you. Martial arts teach that no one is born with an innate advantage for victory. Instead, practicing in a way that leverages how one is fashioned physically, mentally, and emotionally provides an increased chance of victory in the battle. A tall person trying to compete like a small person will not succeed, and an army of all tall people will have a lower chance of defeating an army composed of a mix of people of all types. Watch a video of foil fencing teams to see compelling examples of this phenomenon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51w6uvqr03Q>

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With so much to do, it can be challenging to respect the need, as a human, to rest. Yet, it is rest that allows us to succeed when we reengage. We saw this at its extreme during and after COVID.⁵ Sometimes, it can be helpful to consider what advice we might give a friend under similar circumstances and then apply it to our situation. This brings us to our next principle: reframe.

REFRAME

Look at the situation with a new narrative in mind. Dr Maya Bass' poem “Keep Moving”⁶ walks through the common encompassing daily challenges that we face and ends with a focus on the hope given by the things we have. Drs Waseem Jerjes⁷ and Laura Purkl⁸ continue the conversation on how together we can learn to embrace uncertainty in life and by practice build self-compassion through reflection. Dr Kristen Neff has a library of self-compassion exercises to help you develop your self-compassion skills.⁹

We are well trained to provide comprehensive family medicine care and we desire all our learners to grow into excellent clinicians. Dr Umstadt Meyer's team article on inter-professional workshops illustrates how leaning into the love of learning and the expertise of those in the public health field can increase our confidence in addressing the challenges of social determinants of health in our communities.¹⁰ Reframing challenges as an opportunity to learn can ease the burden of needing to have all the answers upfront.

REFOCUS

Keep your core passion(s) alive. Dr Peter Carek's team's study shows that not only do our residents graduate ready to provide continuity of care, but those seeking additional training in their areas of interest also have less burnout and tend to become

faculty.¹¹ It seems we are educating our future colleagues well, and the opportunity lies in adapting to new best practices and technology. STFM has recently laid out a vision for the future with the 2025–2029 strategic plan¹² that will help us focus more clearly on what we aim to accomplish in academic family medicine.

We are excited about the future, not because the world is rosy, without injustices, new technology, or difficult-to-understand educational theories, but because we can choose our response and embrace the journey. We can rest in who we are and what we do well. We can frame continuous learning through a lens of self-compassion. We can lean into our network for help, remembering that our primary goal is to choose joy. May each of you find joy in the journey and support each other. It is our choice.

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