



Creating Connections – The role of Healthcare Practitioners

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Since time immemorial, people have found ways to communicate with one another. While the medium has changed, from drawings on caves to writing letters, telegrams and emails, the purpose has not. Humans need social connection—more evident than ever today with the COVID-19 crisis driving physical separation and health anxiety.

Headlines are dominating the worldwide media landscape, but this isn't our first health crisis. Previous health crises including HIV and diabetes have plagued the public for many years, and medical professionals have always weighed in on solutions to solve these global health problems.

However, the current viral pandemic is of an unprecedented scale. More people than ever are working from home, separated from colleagues. Essential workers like our healthcare providers are experiencing the strain of being at work still separated from others by personal protective equipment.

Beyond broadcasting health problems, how can we use today's communication tools to not only educate the population about health and wellness but also connect with others in a meaningful way?

Technology – An opportunity and a Risk

Technology has created an opportunity to restore the social connection so fundamental to humanity. But with our increasingly connected world there is both opportunity and risk. Numerous studies show a correlation between increased technology use and increased loneliness. Other studies claim the opposite. These studies agree on one thing—depending on what one uses technology for, one may feel better or worse accordingly.

Healthcare Practitioners must be more focused on the positive

As healthcare practitioners, it is hard to turn off the negative. We see disease and we work hard to help others that we begin to wear down. Burnout in the healthcare field is high. It is imperative that we take care of ourselves. Our selective use of technology can help ease the burden. To keep ourselves mentally healthy, we can use social media to stay in touch with family and friends. Constantly tuning in to news with negative reports can drag our moods down and raise stress levels. A balance is needed. Set aside time to disconnect from news and use technology to catch up with loved ones. Connecting with people in your close circles to talk about any feelings of anxiety or distress is a proven stress coping technique and can boost your mood. You may be apart from your close ones, but that does not mean you have to isolate from them completely. Try having phone calls, video calls and reach out on social media.

The Role of Healthcare Practitioners with their patients

Healthcare providers are slowly recognizing the power of connection. As a result of social distancing, healthcare providers are increasingly connecting online with their patients. Telemedicine is booming in the age of COVID-19. Doctors, nutritionists, therapists, and counsellors turn to tele-consultations to address basic healthcare questions and address urgent needs. Patients need not risk contracting the coronavirus on the way to receive healthcare and can address healthcare concerns at the comfort of their homes.

Healthcare providers in this scenario should move beyond checking on a disease but checking on life itself. Wouldn't it be nice if the healthcare system was more like my Nike Run Club app, sending me a message of praise for a healthy action I took instead of simply reminding me of my next diabetic appointment? Even without the healthcare system there are ample opportunities now to plug into health enhancing communities. Healthcare providers can play a creative and positive role by forming private chat groups and creating an opportunity to connect with a community thereby addressing what we lacked - a feeling of deep connection.

You have a choice

Technology is not the challenge—the challenge is the intentional choice to plug into sources that energize us mentally. Like a moth to a flame, we need not fly straight into the negative energy that consumes and isolates so many. We can find great, meaningful connections with those who truly care for our wellbeing.

Our imperative is to stay connected. And just like saying no to that unhealthy food choice, we can say no to unhealthy influences in our lives.