

WONCA POLARIS NEWSLETTER



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USA



CANADA



CARIBBEAN



RESILIENCY

Whether we lost family, had relationships fall apart, watched children grow up from afar, or were just studying medicine, the requirements for this career are draining on our mental, physical, and emotional health.

We have several stories today about resiliency across our region and how your colleagues are surviving this historic moment in a field that already needed revolution. We have what I hope will be stories that bring hope and inspiration to your lives. However, it is important to remember that many of us are not okay and are trying to rebalance after several difficult years. This recovery is an ongoing process. Some say two steps forward, one step backwards, but I like to think of it more as two steps forward, fall into deep pit, scramble around a little, and eventually

climb out of pit, then repeat.

Some people are newly falling into the hole, some have not yet pulled themselves out at all, and some will not pull themselves out wanting to continue medicine. Wherever we are in this process, the number one thing we have to do is support each other and remember that it is okay to not be okay. It is okay to have lost hope and be looking for ways to find it again. We hope that Wonca Polaris can bring you hope and support and are excited to share some stories with you.

Check out our website for full Q&A answers with our contributors – www.woncapolaris.org

USA: Brendan Prast, MD; Leadership in Preventive Medicine Fellow Maine Medical Center

Q: What does wellness mean to you, and how do you deal with stress?

A: "Wellness means balance, both in physical and mental health. As a family physician and resident/fellow, my life involves a huge amount of stress at baseline. In addition, as someone who is passionate about reproductive justice, there is even more stress and anger through the past years with a myriad of baseless attacks on reproductive rights across the country. The increased attacks and overturning of Roe v. Wade have been tougher to cope with at times, but I use that anger to fuel my advocacy work, running multiple organizations and speaking up for my communities as much as possible. That being said, my focus from the beginning of residency has been to maintain a healthy work-life balance so I do take time for myself.



Q: What are the ways in which you and/or your organization helps support your colleagues?

A: "I think the most important way my organization and program have supported me and my colleagues through burnout or stress is by allowing us to share it. Many of our faculty encourage vulnerability by sharing themselves. By revealing how we are all struggling with the stress of COVID and the healthcare system in general, we strengthen our healthcare provider community and our wellness."

- Brendan Prast, MD

I have made sure to find friends and activities outside of medicine, so I have an escape from the medical field with many other activities such as cooking, hiking, playing music, and gaming. When I am feeling more down or stressed, I allow myself to feel that and accept it in order to work through it. Learning about and practicing Acceptance and Commitment Therapy has really helped me with this.

"When not working in either the clinic or hospital, I contribute to multiple advocacy groups on a weekly basis, including the Reproductive Health Access Project and Maine Providers Standing Up for Healthcare. My next step after graduating this spring will be the Preventive Medicine Fellowship at Maine Medical Center."

Canada: Nikita Pasricha; MS1 Queen's University

Q: How do you go about dealing with change and uncertainty?

A: "Starting medical school in the middle of a pandemic posed many initial concerns. We were unsure if the start of our Medical School would be in person or online, and what our year would look like. Just like everyone else though, we learned to adapt and be flexible. In general, the way I manage uncertainty is to keep a positive perspective that unexpected changes are often out of one's control. I try to see change as an opportunity to grow and expand my horizons if approached with the right mindset."

Q: What does wellness mean to you, and how do you deal with stress?

A: "As someone who loves personal fitness, wellness is an extremely instrumental part of my life. To me, wellness means that you have the ability to thrive and succeed with different areas of health (physical, mental, social, emotional) to your desires and to the best of your abilities. When I get stressed, I try to carry on with my routine to keep myself grounded. Like many other students, exam season is usually when I feel most stressed. I try to alleviate this stress by still exercising, having time for myself, and using

friends and family as support to get me through these stressful times. We often get so lost in the science and the content that we are studying that it can be easy to forget why we are learning it. Sometimes, all I need is a conversation with a friend to remind me of the purpose behind what we are doing."

Q: What are the ways in which you and/or your organization helps support your colleagues?

A: "I find our close-knit community to be a great resource to help cope with stress and burnout. Firstly, friends at Queen's Med are a great resource because we all have the same schedule and fall in stressful situations at the same time. Our class also seeks to support one another by creating study sessions and sharing helpful study tools. Additionally, having our class council put on small sporting or social events acts as a great outlet during stressful times. Our class council also does an excellent job at improving accessibility and making sure there is strong communication between the students and faculty. On a broader level, Queen's Medicine has resources where students can reach out to professionals/healthcare providers, if they need."

Caribbean: Merrilyn A. Wallace-Bain; Practicing physician at Princess Margaret Hospital, Nassau

Q: How do you go about dealing with change and uncertainty?

A: "The Covid-19 pandemic changed our comfort in the way we delivered healthcare in the community. Irrespective of this change and the uncertainty it brought, the fundamentals and focus of my practice remained the same, to be a trusted and compassionate physician delivering high-quality evidence-based medicine to all patients served. In truth, the pandemic brought out the best in me as a Family Physician. I was challenged to demonstrate ingenuity in finding ways to ensure continuity of care.

Although the demands of being a physician are challenging, my passion for my calling is unwavering. Being a Family Physician is not what I do, it is who I am."



Q: What does wellness mean to you and how do you deal with stress?

A: "Wellness is what I strive for in my patients and myself because if I am not well, how can I be the best for my patients? During the pandemic wellness became more challenging for me to achieve as the increased level of unrelieved stress quickly led to increased emotional and physical exhaustion which placed me at higher risk for burnout. Thankfully, feeling a sense of personal achievement in being able to continue to serve my patients and make a positive difference in their lives offered some protection in reducing the severity of the burnout. Also playing a role are mindfulness, routine physical exercise, and an unshakable faith in God."

Q: What are ways in which you and/or your organization help support your colleagues?

A: "Whenever, I see a colleague on the brink of burnout, I remind them just how much their efforts are appreciated by me and the patients they serve. For myself, when my patients do well, I am invigorated to persevere. Additionally, I advise my colleagues that it is ok to take a break and regroup, encouraging them to engage in activities which bring them peace and reignite their passion for medicine. Furthermore, as a part of the clinic administrative team, I work endlessly to find innovative ways to improve the overall function of the clinic to encourage a smoother flow and ultimately a less stressful working environment."

UPCOMING CONFERENCES IN NORTH AMERICA 2022

JUL 20

Family-centered pregnancy care:

<https://www.aafp.org/cme/all/pregnancy-care/live-course.html>

JUL 28

AAFP National Conference Family Medicine Residents and Medical Students:

<https://www.aafp.org/event/s/national-conference.html>

SEPT 20

Family medicine experience: <https://www.aafp.org/events/fmx.html>

NOV 9

Family Medicine forum: <https://fmf.cfpc.ca/>



