

How We Heal

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I'm a 75-year-old doctor/writer who caught the corona virus sometime the first week of March, in appearances for my new novel [Man's 4th Best Hospital](#) at hospitals and medical schools in the Bronx and Brooklyn. Back in Boston, I gifted it to my wife. After a scary six weeks—we docs know too much to *not* be scared—I and she have recovered, mostly. In addition to the physical symptoms, the fear was intense. Every shiver is “fever,” every cough echoes with “ventilator.” Our doctor’s fortitude and denial struggles with our having seen the worst of illness and death. We may suddenly break out in dread.

How to heal patients and ourselves?

The healing “we”.

“Heal” can mean “heal others,” and at the same time mean “heal ourselves.” At our best as doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers, when we use our expertise and kindness to heal others, we also feel healed. There is a sense of mutual connection. Each person feels more energy, more a sense of being valued, understood, and finally, more empowered to take action. Even now, with a savage disease treated with intubations and ventilators, when we do our best, our whole team is lifted up. To see a success, bringing a patient back from the edge of death to being wheeled out toward their loved ones, to our applause? A moment of gratitude for all. *Good connection is good medicine*

Attending at the deaths, horrible as that is, can be a profound connection. Often with death near we may feel frustration and sadness. But sometimes this sadness softens into the

healing moments of sorrow, and we come to understand. Sorrow and understanding are, in a way, the same thing. The spirit of “We.”

Being with patients who otherwise would die alone is hard. But if we don’t shy away, it can be part of our healing, even our “calling.” When the heart stops and we drop the hand onto the bed, we may feel a strange gratitude. After all, this is the job we chose. Many of us became doctors to be present with patients at the worst times in their lives, walking them through suffering, providing solace. Compassion means “suffering with.”

We healthcare workers also need healing. We work in a war zone, scared of being hit with the virus. Many of us work in the fog of exhaustion, depressed, on edge and angry. Insomnia, anxiety, distraction, GI distress, fear. Suicides are starting to appear. We ask ourselves, “Am I edging into PTSD?” We do shifts in heightened states, barely making it through endless tough situations. How to survive?

Isolation is deadly, connection heals. *Stick together.* At those crucial times, when all we want to do is get away and hide, we have to move in the opposite direction, and ask for help. Help from our local “we.”

The stories we tell of this plague will shape the rest of our lives. “Where were you,” we will be asked, “during the pandemic?”

The moment is upon us, bright and clear as moments ever get: of death, of life. If we stick together in mutual relationship, attracting others to our shared kindness, we will heal.

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