Monthly Wellness Update

The Wellness Initiative is a program of the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Center at the University of Michigan. This initiative supports family caregivers of adults living with memory loss through providing innovative wellness programs emphasizing stress resilience to ensure continued health and well-being on the caregiving journey.

West Park, Ann Arbor, March 2020

In March winter is holding back and spring is pulling forward. Something holds and something pulls inside of us too. ~ Jean Hersey

It seems safe to declare now that March has arrived "like a lamb." I hope you are enjoying the inviting warmth and sunshine this week. As I took a walk Monday it was as if the city was hosting a small strolling festival. I felt like a happy straggler in a flash mob or spontaneous parade. I smiled at more babies and dogs than I have in months while stepping aside for runners and bikers and those moving much faster than myself. As the half moon hung high in the clear blue sky above us, the sun made its descent and the bird song accompanied us back to our homes. All felt truly swell. As I bounced homeward with confidence, I was swept up in the hopefulness of the transitioning season until I stepped in a deep, shockingly cold and slushy puddle of murky Midwest snow pile debris. You know the kind…with the floating trash and border cliffs of mud mottled ice. You likely know the experience, too. I nodded to myself, a certain Ya got me there, feeling. It ain’t over ’til it’s over. I know, I know.I shook myself off and carried on home with the discomfort, chill and humor of the moment still with me, awkwardly, until I was able to sit and remove my damp shoe and sock. Joke’s on me. Still, it was a great walk. And also true, the ending was incredibly gross and I almost let it rob me of my temporary, impenetrable joy. The meaning of the puddle was there for me to interpret.

And so it is with the way we often feel our peace is disrupted. Transitions are hard. Something as universal as one season to the next can mirror the difficulty, as well as the rewards, of arriving at our preferred destination or in our preferred state of being. Perhaps we all lean toward an inner spring. As we track our changes and our growth while moving through a challenging experience, we recognize how transitions are, by nature, filled with uncertainty and often feel clumsy. They can be fraught with discomfort and feel disorienting, pressurized and exhausting at times. Since we cannot stop, change or be completely closed off from the world and other people, we can only control how we respond and move through transitions. Whether we begin with resistance or an open-hearted approach, we can be certain
these temporary states will fluctuate as we enter a square dance with trust and apprehension, determination and maybe, like me, a dash of willful indignance.

Transitions are something we don’t express much appreciation for in our lives. After all, they are not particularly comfortable, making it more tolerable to focus on a desired outcome. We tend to speak of transitions as something to endure with an edge. The language we often use highlights this slog: getting through, pushing through, waiting it out, etc... Over the years, I have learned something invaluable from caregivers about transitions; how critical, precious and fertile transitions truly are in our lives. Paradoxically, the most important life lesson I have learned from caregivers is that it is all a transition. All of life is a transition practice. We can learn to move in harmony with transitions, to make meaningful micro-movements to adjust, over and over again, rather than fight it or even worse, believe we are somehow doing “it” wrong. How we meet transition is connected to how we foster our resilience and to how we experience pleasure in our lives, how we navigate discomfort, leading us back to how we meet things as they are and how we once again, experience... transition.

So, how about right now? What are you experiencing as a transition and how would you describe your relationship with this in your life? Just noticing what, if anything, is taking shape and how this feels. With a birds-eye-view and a non-judgmental spirit, how might this be influencing our relationships and most importantly, how are we in relationship with ourselves and our own wellbeing as it relates to a particular transition or a sense of feeling squeezed? What comes up when you gently scratch the surface of your awareness with these simple prompts:

If I can just ______________ I feel like I will be able to ______________.
I am so frustrated with ______________. I’m really hoping this will ______________.
Right now, I am learning to ______________ so I can ______________.
Beneath the surface, I know I am ready to ______________.
I can barely wait to finish ______________.
I am simultaneously holding ______________ and pulling ______________.

As we contemplate these questions, I will be looking forward to seeing you this coming Monday, March 9 at Catching Your Breath. I hope you will join us for a morning of renewal, inquiry and deepening transition practice.

Registration is now open for the next Mindfulness-based Dementia Care Class (MBDC). Spread the word and reserve your spot if you have not experienced this class before or if you are ready for a refresher.

In gratitude,

—Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW
10:00am - Noon
Caregiver Wellness Day
A half-day wellness, creativity, and social retreat for care partners of adults living with memory loss. Registration required.
Thursday, May 21
10:00am - Noon

All events take place at the U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens Auditorium
1800 N. Dixboro Road in Ann Arbor

Please note: Parking at Matthaei is $1.70/hr. If you need assistance with this fee, please let us know.

Soothing Word of the Month

Sondor
(Noun) the realization that each passerby has a life as vivid and complex as your own.
Coined in 2012 by John Koenig, whose project, The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows, aims to come up with new words for emotions that currently lack words. Inspired by German sonder- (“special”) and French sonder (“to probe”).

Caregiver Research Studies

Couples’ Well-Being in Everyday Life Study (C-WEL Study)
Investigating everyday challenges among couples living with early-stage (mild) dementia and their responses to these challenges to learn more about ways to help both partners live well together. Study is recruiting couples in which one partner is 65 or older, has received a diagnosis of dementia within the last 3 years, and has mild cognitive impairment. Contact cwelstudy@umich.edu or 734-232-0532. This study team is enrolling participants who live within 60 miles of Ann Arbor to meet with them at home and over the phone.
The ACE Project
This study is investigating caregiver mental health, physical health, and social supports with the aim of developing culturally tailored programming. This study is seeking African American caregivers of persons with dementia or cognitive impairments to complete a survey. Contact Dr. Sheria Robinson-Lane at grices@med.umich.edu or 734-764-9280. This study team will meet participants in the home.

Our Center supports many other research studies that you or your family member may be interested in. For a full list of recruiting studies, please visit the link here.