WELLNESS MILESTONES

2016 Jan Stewart Memorial Lecture Preview: An Interview with George Ceremuga

On Sept. 10, at the AANA Nurse Anesthesia Annual Congress, George Ceremuga, DO, will present “Self-Care for the Mind, Body and Spirit,” the 2016 Jan Stewart Memorial Lecture. Ceremuga has a varied background, beginning with an undergraduate education at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and service as an infantry officer. Following this he pursued a career as a physician and currently serves as clinical director, Lower Brule Indian Health Service, Lower Brule, S.D. Ceremuga has a personal attachment to the profession of nurse anesthesia in that his brother, sister and brother-in-law are CRNAs.1 Throughout his career, Ceremuga has promoted the concept of self-care, which is particularly important for health professionals. When we practice self-care, we empower ourselves. We are saying it is OK to care for ourselves. When we care for ourselves and practice healthy lifestyle habits, we form the groundwork for imparting those behaviors to our patients and colleagues.

Developing Appropriate and Effective Coping Skills

Coping is a continuum-based process. We learn coping strategies as we move through life, seeking what works in different situations. As we encounter new, more demanding situations, we must be sure to be alert for maladaptive coping mechanisms.

When people are wounded and develop feelings of guilt, grief, and abandonment or experience emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, they may try to dull the pain by substance misuse. Kravits et al2 noted the signs of burnout in nurses and examined coping mechanisms such as art, deep breathing, positive intention practice, relaxation and guided imagery, and personalized wellness plans. Good habits of self-care and healthy coping mechanisms can be tools to fall back on when challenged by these negative aspects of life. In our profession, every day (often continuously) we face stressful situations.

We have to make split-second decisions that affect our patients’ very lives. Sometimes we also have to deal with colleagues whose behavior may be less than helpful/respectful. Ceremuga says that we need to remember the following:
1. Be respectful and appreciative of one another.
2. However, don’t be a pushover.
3. Anticipate tension and relax by smiling.
4. We cannot control people, places, things, or events, only how we react to them.

Resilience in the Face of Adversity

When subjected to negative situations/people, we may suffer consequences that run the gamut from anger and frustration to actual physical illness. We need to understand the concept of resilience.3 “Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means ‘bouncing back’ from difficult experiences.” We all have resilience in our character to one degree or another. It is a question of developing it further and using it to cope with the negativity that we sometimes experience in our lives. Some examples of resilient behaviors are:3
1. Not looking at crises as being insurmountable: You cannot change that the crisis occurred, but you can control how you handle it.
2. Accept change: It is an inevitable part of life.
3. Be decisive: Do what you can to handle your situation.
4. Connect with others: People who you can discuss your struggles with can help you build stronger resilience.
5. Keep things in perspective: Look at the bigger picture.
6. Take care of yourself: Here the concept of self-care comes into view again. Develop and practice health-promoting habits such as exercise, maintaining a healthy nutritional intake, and getting enough sleep.
Mindfulness—Being in the Moment

“Mindfulness” is another important part of self-care and stress reduction. “Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment.” Ceremuga shares his own simple three-step “Mindfulness in Meditation”:

1. Smile: Be approachable.
2. Breathing (slow down): Inhale over 4 seconds; hold the breath for 7 seconds; and exhale over 8 seconds. Do this three times.
3. Think of love.

When your mind wanders, re-center it by repeating the meditation.

To cultivate mindfulness within himself, Ceremuga uses the “Serenity Prayer” (attributed to Reinhold Neibuhr (1892-1971):

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.5

Dealing with Stress and Staying Well

Stress contributes to diseases such as hypertension, heart disease, metabolic derangements with glucose metabolism, and poor immune function. According to Ceremuga, self-care means engaging in what he calls the “Five Pillars of Wellness”:

1. Drink water: bottled, spring, or filtered.
2. Eat a plant-based, anti-inflammatory diet.
3. Exercise on most days for 20-30 minutes. Be open to different types of restorative activities such as yoga, meditation, and martial arts. What one is trying to do here is to create a union of mind-body-spirit.
4. Sleep 7-9 hours per night. We need good-quality, restorative sleep. A few barriers to achieving a good night’s sleep are the inability to turn off electronics and not calming the mind before sleep by engaging in activities such as meditation. There is some evidence that meditation assists with neuroplasticity, i.e. “grows neurons”.
5. Practice love and forgiveness. We are all on a spiritual journey. Mind-Body-Spirit: Healing these is our role.

Here are some of the many modalities of self-care found in the literature:

- Feng Shui
- Music/art/pet therapy
- Massage
- Tai Chi
- Reiki/healing touch
- Labyrinth Walk
- Mantra
- Drum circle
- Hypnotherapy
- Traditional yoga
- Tea and/or herbal/aroma therapy
- Mindfulness/guided/chakra meditation
- Guided imagery

Passing on Tools for Self-Care for the Mind, Body and Spirit

Ceremuga said that his goal in speaking at the AANA Congress is to pass on tools for guided meditation for personal and professional use. At the end of our interview, he left me with the following:

- Focus on the present.
- Acknowledge the past, and replace the bad aspects with good things.
- Bear in mind, the future will bring up its own issues.

References

1. Ceremuga G. Telephonic communication, March 28, 2016