

Leadership & Professional Development: Cultivating Microcultures of Well-being

Ryan E Nelson, MD^{1,2*}, Daniel N Ricotta, MD, FHM^{1,2,3}

¹Department of Medicine, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston, Massachusetts; ²Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts; ³Carl J Shapiro Institute for Education and Research, Boston, Massachusetts.

"As we work to create light for others, we naturally light our own way."

– Mary Anne Radmacher

Perhaps unknowingly, hospitalists establish microcultures in their everyday work. Hospitalists' interactions with colleagues often occur in the context of shared workspaces. The nature of these seemingly minor exchanges shapes the microculture, often described as the culture shared by a small group based on location within an organization. Hospitalists have an opportunity to cultivate well-being within these microcultures through gracious and thoughtful acknowledgments of their peers. Collegial support at the micro level influences wellness at the organizational level. A larger shared culture of wellness is necessary to nurture physicians' personal fulfillment and professional development.¹

We propose the **CARE** framework for cultivating well-being within the microcultures of hospital medicine shared workspaces. CARE consists of **C**apitalization, **A**ctive listening, **R**ecognition, and **E**mpathy. This framework is based on positive psychology research and inspired by lessons from *The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor.²

Capitalization. Capitalization is defined as sharing upbeat news and receiving a positive reaction. Emotional support during good times, more so than during bad times, strengthens relationships. When a peer shares good news, show enthusiasm and counter with an active, constructive response to maximize the validation she perceives.²

For example, Alex sits at her desk and says to Kristen:

"My workshop proposal was accepted for medical education day!"

"Congratulations, Alex! Tell me more about the workshop."

Active listening. Active listening requires concentration and observation of body language. Show engagement by maintaining an open posture, using positive facial expressions, and providing occasional cues that you're paying attention. Paraphrasing and asking targeted questions to dive deeper demonstrates genuine interest.

"Katie, I could use your advice. Do you have a minute?"

Katie turns to face John and smiles. "Of course. How can I help?"

"My team seems drained after a code this morning. I planned a lecture for later, but I'm not sure this is the right time."

Katie nods. "I think you're right, John. How have you thought about handling the situation?"

Recognition. Acts of recognition and encouragement are catalysts for boosting morale. Even brief expressions of gratitude can have a significant emotional impact. Recognition is most meaningful when delivered deliberately and with warmth.

Kevin walks into the hospitalist workroom. "Diane, congratulations on your publication! I plan to make a medication interaction review part of my discharge workflow."

Leah turns to Diane. "Diane, that's great news! Can you send me the link to your article?"

Empathy. Burnout is prevalent in medicine, and our fellow hospitalists deserve empathy. Showing empathy reduces stress and promotes connectedness. Sense when your colleagues are in distress and take time to share in their feelings and emotions. Draw on your own clinical experience to find common ground and convey understanding.

"I transferred another patient with COVID-19 to the ICU. I spent the last hour talking to family."

"Ashwin, you've had a tough week. I know how you must feel—I had to transfer a patient yesterday. Want to take a quick walk outside?"

Hospitalists are inherently busy while on service, but these four interventions are brief, requiring only several minutes. Each small investment of your time will pay significant emotional dividends. These practices will not only enhance your colleagues' sense of well-being, but will also bolster your happiness and productivity. A positive mindset fosters creative thinking and enhances complex problem solving. Recharging the microcultures of hospitalist workspaces with positivity will spark a larger transformation at the organizational level. That's because positive actions are contagious.² One hospitalist's commitment to CARE will encourage other hospitalists to adopt these behaviors, establishing a virtuous cycle that sustains an organization's culture of wellness.

Disclosures: The authors have no conflicts to disclose.

References

1. Bohman B, Dyrbye L, Sinsky CA, et al. Physician well-being: the reciprocity of practice efficiency, culture of wellness, and personal resilience. *NEJM Catalyst*. August 7, 2017. Accessed June 24, 2021. <https://catalyst.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/CAT.17.0429>
2. Achor S. *The Happiness Advantage: How a Positive Brain Fuels Success in Work and Life*. Currency; 2010.

*Corresponding Author: Ryan E Nelson, MD; Email: rnelson2@bidmc.harvard.edu; Telephone: 617-754-4677.

Received: April 6, 2021; Accepted: April 8, 2021

© 2021 Society of Hospital Medicine DOI 10.12788/jhm.3635