

Staying Strong in the Midst of Challenging Times

by Kurt Newman

In what has been an unprecedented and challenging time for our world, heroes have emerged: healthcare workers, scientists and the teams who support the delivery of care, just to name a few. In their own unique way, each of these groups has pulled communities together, inspiring hope in dark moments through their compassion, care, and scientific breakthroughs.

For me, our Children's National Hospital frontline employees have been our greatest strength – true heroes in this pandemic. They adapted and adjusted throughout this global health crisis with incredible fortitude, optimism, creativity, and personal sacrifice. They never wavered in their commitment, compassion and connection to our patients and families. They have gone above and beyond during the pandemic, and for that, I'm grateful.

With the help of our employees, Children's National Hospital has been among the first to respond to the needs of our community during this health crisis, and this provided us with insights we've shared with the rest of the world. For example:

- Children's National launched one of the nation's first pediatric drive through/walk-up COVID-19 testing sites. Data from this testing allowed us to publish a study sharing clear evidence that Hispanic and Black children, as well as children from lower socioeconomic communities, face higher rates of COVID-19 infection.
- We were also among the first to provide published evidence challenging the conventional wisdom that COVID-19 did not seriously impact children.

In January and February, we are playing a lead role with the District of Columbia Public Schools and DC Department of Health by vaccinating teachers and staff so that children can begin returning to classrooms. This pandemic has made clear that children benefit enormously from in-person education. Many kids are falling behind because it's harder to learn virtually and keep students engaged. In addition, some students lack steady access to the internet. We as a country need to do all we can to help children catch up educationally as well as provide them with the mental health services they need to live healthier lives. As one of my favorite quotes by Nelson Mandela says, "The true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its children."

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As we think about the future, I am reminded of how stressful this past year has been. We, as a society and a health system, have endured a lot. Our Children's National Hospital employees have maintained an intense pace during this crisis, and it's very important to me that they take care of themselves. To that end, Children's National has hosted sessions on meditation, breathing techniques, virtual yoga classes, and how to cope with anxiety and stress – just to name a few. Personally, I have managed my stress through meditation, exercise and spending quality time with my family.

No one knows when this pandemic will end. So, it's very important for all of us, especially healthcare workers, to maintain our physical and mental health. I encourage everyone to take time for something you enjoy each day that recharges your batteries, even if it's just for a few moments. I also recommend identifying one thing each day for which you're grateful. When all seems bleak and lost, it's important to be mindful of all that we have and the things that are going right in our lives.

In that spirit, I'm grateful for the amazing work of the scientists who developed vaccines and the teams administering them. These people are the reason we may have reached the beginning of the pandemic's end, and by continuing to be kind, selfless and courageous, we can get through this global health crisis together.



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“In my years of research on human achievement and accomplishment, one of the most striking things I've learned is that a high expectation of success is the single most valuable quality you can bring into any challenging situation. A high expectation of success is more important than natural ability or the lack thereof. It's more important than practice or preparation. This has been proven in any number of controlled experiments.”

Denis Waitley: *The New Dynamics of Winning*