



LEXINGTON MEDICAL SOCIETY

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May 2017

President's Message:



Robert P. Granacher, Jr., MD, MBA

Do you know the difference between pressure and stress? Pressure is not stress. However, the former is converted to the latter when you add one ingredient: rumination, the tendency to keep rethinking past or future events while attaching negative emotions to those thoughts. Nicholas Petrie covers this topic for executives in *Harvard Business Review* (Pressure Doesn't Have to Turn Into Stress, *HBR*, March 16, 2017).

Petrie is a senior faculty member at the Center for Creative Leadership, and the lead researcher and creator of its Change Equation, which shows leaders how to change in ways that minimize stress and maximize results. He works with CEOs and their teams to create resilience strategies for organizations.

Pressure is from external forces of practice demands, governmental regulations, patient demands, and other such business and psychological demands in physician's lives. Petrie points out that the process starts with understanding that stress is caused not by other people or external events, but by your reactions to them. In the workplace, many physicians blame their high anxiety levels on a hospital or clinic administrator, practice deadlines, clinic or surgery demands, patient demands, or competing commitments for their precious time. All of us know physician peers who face the same challenges that we do without stress.

The rumination noted above is an ongoing and destructive process that diminishes your health, productivity and wellbeing. Rumination is replete in chronic worriers who show increased incidence of coronary artery disease and suppressed immune functioning. Dwelling on the past or the future takes us away from the present, rendering us unable to complete the work currently on our plates. When you ask a ruminator how they are feeling, none will say "happy." Most feel miserable.

To break these stress-inducing habits, Petrie recommends four steps:

- **Wake up**
- **Control your attention**
- **Put things in perspective**
- **Let go**

We often spend most of the day preoccupied and functioning in state of "waking sleep." All rumination tends to happen during this state, so the first step is for one to break out of it. This can be done through physicality: stand up or sit up, move your hands, and move your body; walk. One can also do it mentally as well: connect with

Upcoming Events:

May 9

LMS General Meeting
with guest speaker,
Congressman Andy Barr
Hilary J. Boone Ctr.

May 12

Senior Lunch
Campbell House

May 18

Health Professional
Well Being
Signature Club

your senses by noticing what you can hear, see, smell, taste, and feel. The idea is to reconnect in the world. As LMS member John Patterson MD often points out in the Lexington Medical Society KentuckyDoc magazine, induce a state of mindfulness.

In the second step, to control your attention, one has to prevent getting caught in an unproductive loop through rumination. You need to redirect yourself into areas in which you can take useful action. Petrie encourages executives to use the following exercise for this action: draw a circle on the page and write down all the things that you can control or influence inside it, and all of the things you cannot control outside the circle. Remind yourself that you care about externalities: your work, your team, your business partners, and your family, without worrying about them.

Using the third step, to put things in perspective, resilient leaders keep things in perspective for themselves and their teams. Ruminators tend to catastrophize.

Petrie's group tell their clients to try three techniques to obtain perspective:

1. Compare a past stress to a current one, such as a major illness versus a problem patient;
2. Ask yourself how much the current situation will matter in three years' time; and
3. Ask, "What is the worst that could happen to you?" or "How would I survive it?"

Ask yourself this other question and challenge yourself from a new angle: "What is an opportunity in this situation I haven't yet seen?" or even "What's funny about this situation?"

The final step in the Petrie method is often the hardest. If it was easy to let go of the kinds of things that cause us to ruminate, we would have done it already. The three techniques noted above may help. However, to gain acceptance: acknowledge that whether you like the situation or not, it is the way it is. Then, learn the lesson. Your brain will review events until it feels you have gained something from them, so ask yourself, "What have I learned from this experience?" Maybe you should take direct action. Sometimes the real solution is not to relax, but to do something about your situation. Ask yourself, "What action is required here?"

Of course, with all issues of behavioral change, practice is required. You are likely to fail at these methods the first time you try them, but through continued practice and trial-and-error, they can become part of your repertoire to prevent pressure from turning into stress.

Robert P. Granacher, MD, MBA

Mission:

The Lexington Medical Society is the principal voice & resource for Central Kentucky physicians to enhance their professional lives & improve the health of the community.

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LMS NEWSLETTER

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