

Mindful Medicine Corner With



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The Nobility of Imperfection

We really never stop learning. Wisdom, I guess, is what we are trying to achieve in the end, and this seems to be the logical goal of it all. But do you ever stop to see the nobility in that prerequisite state of “unknowing” or “not knowing”. To feel inadequate or that we don’t know something can be a very frightening, vulnerable place. But knowing that we are not alone in this universal state of being can also be liberating. In fact, we are quite often in very good company once you pull the curtain back a bit.

This is what I explored this last September when I attended a retreat hosted by the New York Zen Center entitled, “The Nobility of Imperfection”. There I sat on the mat and listened to five days of instructional talks, practiced Zazen (or meditation in the Zen tradition) until my legs were numb, but most importantly I came together in community. How can imperfection bring us together you ask? And why is this even important?

The other day I was sitting around the conference room table with the other medical providers in our office having one of our weekly meetings. We were discussing how to maintain a good work-life balance. But we practice Concierge Medicine - we should have mastered this by now, right? Haven't we reached the end of the finish line by transitioning our practices to this model? Sheepishly, we all came out with our truths about how difficult it is to finish our charts on time, and that we all still spend a great deal of time trying to get caught up afterhours and on weekends.

Some of us were attached to an idea that we were less of a doctor because we couldn't find ways to be more efficient, a shameful narrative to apply to a situation that actually reflected better care for our patients due to the time and effort we spend on our work. Realizing that we are all struggling in the same way was liberating in a way. The curtain of perfection that we tend to drape ourselves in can be heavy and lonely as we constantly fear we are about to be found out. We are hiding behind an illusion that is actually keeping us apart from others.

Being able to admit to our own imperfections is a portal to connection. Think about the nature and power of support groups - whether it be for grief, a medical condition, or any situation where you feel stuck or alone - we come together as a community to hold one another and validate our feelings and struggle. We feel held and seen, the suffering lifted a bit, and this is empowering. In a way we are celebrating what it is to be human, and that we all need connection with others to help uncover the nobility of our imperfections.