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Editorial Musings

Dr. Kendra Gaines, Editor-in-Chief, IJHC

My normally bright-eyed and cheery neighbor was over for a visit, but today he was looking grey in the face. “What’s happened to you, Paul?” I asked. “You’re not looking well.” We were sitting outside in my back yard, a soothing area with the sound of singing birds and water burbling in my little stream. Paul sighed and said, “I’ve just come from watching six hours of news and it’s all bad!”

Me: “Why did you plaster yourself to the screen and watch for six whole hours?”

Paul: “I think it’s important to keep up with the news!”

Me: “Well, now that you’ve kept up with it, how do you feel? Informed?”

Paul: “No, I feel terrible physically, and I’m exhausted emotionally.”

Me: “Has your dual exhaustion changed anything in the news?”

Paul: “No, nothing.”

Me: “But it’s changed you—made you unhealthy and unhappy, with no other result. So, I repeat, why do you do this to yourself, watching for six whole hours?”

Paul: “Now that you’ve said that, I really don’t know!”

I saw Paul about two weeks later and he looked rosy-cheeked and cheerful as he usually did. I asked what he’d been doing to look so well and he responded, “Thank you. You woke me

up. I was making myself sick and didn't realize it. Now I'm rationing my news, getting just enough to keep up with what's going on, but definitely no more six-hour marathons!"

Since that conversation, I've been seeing ever more people looking the way Paul had looked two weeks before. They're stressed out, discouraged, distracted, and occasionally depressed. They focus on the news and feel powerless to change the all-too-many things they don't like. They are literally making themselves sick without changing any of the events or circumstances that they are allowing to sicken them. They often believe that the 24-hour news cycle is what we all need to stay informed, but they haven't as yet learned to cut themselves off before their own health is negatively affected.

To put it bluntly, "staying informed" is not worth making ourselves ill. We must never lose sight of the fact that everything is temporary, that what we might be focused on today—to our own detriment—might well change or disappear tomorrow. So—what should we do instead?

First of all, breathe! Deep breaths, slowly taken, all the way down to the toes. Let that breath out slowly. Then take a look around you. Too many people go through an entire day, and sometimes night, with their heads bent over a tiny screen, often to the point where their reality is within that screen, not in the world around them. Look up at the clouds, or the blue sky, or the brilliant sunshine. Feel the breeze in your hair and move your body. Go for a walk outside and listen to the wind and the birds, not to the endless cacophony that pulsates its way through earbuds into your eardrums, numbing the brain. Tune into the way your body feels and let it relax and flow as you walk. Smile, and greet someone cheerfully. In short, engage in real life, without clutching that little screen and peering compulsively at all that lurks within.

The old, and very wise, saying is, "There's a time and a place for everything." Take that walk. You can check your phone when you return. Everything in it will still be there. You can find out what's in today's news later, when the news has been collected and digested. Remember what is truly important, which is *not* your cell phone and *not* today's news. It's your health and your well-being that matters. You may not be able to control the news, but you can definitely control your own behavior! Keep this in mind if you find yourself going into stress mode again. The simple fact is, you do not have to go there. You have the power within you to focus on your own mental and physical health instead.

Bio:

Dr. Kendra Gaines received her doctorate in English Literature from Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois. She taught at Northwestern, as well as University of Michigan, before moving to Tucson. At the University of Arizona, she served for 16 years as Senior Tutor and Instructional Specialist in, first, the Department of English, and then at the UA's Writing Skills Improvement Program. Dr. Gaines has taught at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base for almost 30 years, teaching for Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Chapman University, Park University, and Pima College. Dr. Gaines teaches online as well. She is completing her seventeenth year teaching both English and Philosophy courses for Colorado Technical University. She has also been teaching online for Park University, work which has included several blended (both online and in person) courses and is a full Professor of English at Akamai University.

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