

# DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY WEEK OF APRIL 6, 2020



[https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/04/01/opinion/applauding-our-health-care-workers/;](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/04/01/opinion/applauding-our-health-care-workers/)  
accessed 04072020

## Reflections

If you know have ever listened to me sign out a service, then you know that I love old men. “He’s SUCH a cutie!” I’ll exclaim about the 78 year old man with a perforated gastric ulcer before launching into his course and active issues. I am fond of all the old men, but especially the cuties.

A cutie is a particular type of old man. He often is a little scruffy, maybe he still drinks a lot beer, or maybe just a little. He either has a wife or daughter that adores him, or he has no one at all. He believes that most people are flawed but good because he knows this to be true about himself. He knows that most people show up to do their job each day because it is, quite simply, their job, and he has learned that there is pride to be found in this. When he talks to you, he tells you honestly about his symptoms—which is to say, he doesn’t over or under emphasize them. This is because he trusts that you’ll listen and do right by him. He doesn’t expect more than that, and he will say, sincerely and graciously, “thanks doc” for what you do to try to help him, even if there is not much to be done.

These are the patients, I have observed, who make it through.

During World War II, there was a disturbing trend within the British navy. Young military officers, strong and well educated, would often die in a shipwreck whereas the old seafarers would survive. Lawrence Holt, the owner of a British shipping line whose boats were targeted by German U boats, said, "I would rather entrust the lowering of a lifeboat in mid-Atlantic to a sail-trained octogenarian than to a young sea technician who is completely trained in the modern way but has never been sprayed by salt water." Holt, along with Kurt Hahn, a Jewish German educator, hypothesized that a deficiency in selflessness, self-reliance, and internal strength was to explain the discrepancy. Thus, they founded Outward Bound, an outdoor school which taught young people, through a three day solo trip in the wilderness, an essential skill: The physical, and more importantly, mental, endurance needed to survive the starkest of challenges.

This is the wisdom the old men—my cuties—have to impart. They know how to survive because they have lived.

It is clear to me that this moment calls for endurance in all forms, and I would posit, just like Holt and Hahn, that cultivating strength of mind will give us what we need to care for our patients, each other, and ourselves through this long period of uncertainty. We hope that this weekly email will help foster such strength in our department as a whole and within each of us as caregivers.

Give yourself some to reflect:

1. Who are your favorite patients?
2. What is it about them that makes them “your favorite”?
3. What have these patients taught you about facing difficult situations or times of uncertainty?

Katherine Bakke, MD

### **Perspectives from a Master Surgeon**

The Surgery Department knows how much of an affinity I have for World War 2 history and the Greatest Generation’s navigation through those incredibly difficult years. We asked so much of them and they delivered

Now here we are fighting this unseen invader and asking so much from you terrific residents on the front lines unlike any generation before. I know you will never have to hear another lecture about grit and resilience and respect again after weathering this—indeed you will be the lecturers.

I applaud your courage, dedication and skills and I pray for you and your family's wellbeing. A famous economist, Leon C. Megginson, once said - "It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change."

I know you have that adaptability in you. We will get through this and this year's Christmas show will reflect the crazy times you have had. Can't wait to hear the tales you will tell. Thanks for everything. Stay safe!

Michael Hirsh, MD

### **Stories From the Front & Other Surgery Storytelling**

Nights in the COVID ICU can be busy. Between transfers from the other ICU's for COVID-19 rule out and admissions of decompensating patients, there is almost always someone waiting to take an empty bed. Every task is burdened by frequent PPE changes and confusion over rapidly evolving protocols. As surgical residents, we can readily place lines, complete admission and discharge paperwork, and call consults. There is always room for a helping hand. This is especially true in the medical ICU's, where a brief walk reveals rows of prone patients and escalating ventilator settings. Certainly, nobody prefers to work in a COVID ICU. But we are called to follow the need, and our colleagues in the medical units appreciate every reinforcement they can get.

Brian Jao, MD

Thank you for your leadership in the early weeks, Brian Jao, MD, and for this contribution.

We all love stories about great saves, "so crazy I can't believe that worked" cases, and ridiculous antics in the hospital. Plus, we all miss operating but in this, and at the root we are people and physicians.

### **Mindfulness**

*During these stressful and uncertain times, exercise has become even more important for my mental and physical wellbeing. It also me to continue to connect with other people during virtual workout classes and keeps me energized throughout the days. Ashley Russo, MD*

For those who are looking for outlets for wellbeing and mindfulness, we enclosed some to get you started...and a little challenge.

- Peloton: The Peloton app is free for 90 days! It's not just cycling (which is good or else we would all—including DoctorAsh and Rjhendrix—be shown up by Meech, wheelgoodMD, and DrDenial but not by MrsElastigirl). Check out the yoga, meditation, or the new cardio dance. In addition, accounts can be made on those who own the bike or tread. Reach out! <https://www.onepeloton.com/>
  - **A challenge: To kick this off, please join us this Saturday, April 11 at 8 am to start our day with 20 minute Dance Cardio, originally posted 3/5/3020 at 10 am. The current episode will have a photo with two women in red. Send a photo for the next newsletter!**
- Headspace for Health Care Workers: <https://www.headspace.com/covid-19>
- 10% Happier App for Health Care Workers: <https://www.tenpercent.com/care>
- Calm App: <https://www.calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath#meditations>

### Shout-outs & Snaps

Ulises Torres, MD has been our go-to for countless initiatives: Department of Surgery Quality and Patient Safety, nutrition, and global surgery, just to name a few. However, in this inaugural newsletter, we wish to highlight Dr Torres' incredible effort in organizing departmental PPE resources. Along with his coordination of the ICU deployment, Dr. Torres worked around the clock to ensure that department members had PPE ahead of the curve. Dr. Torres, we are eternally grateful for your leadership and for making it your mission, along with Dr. Litwin, to help us stay safe while caring for patients.

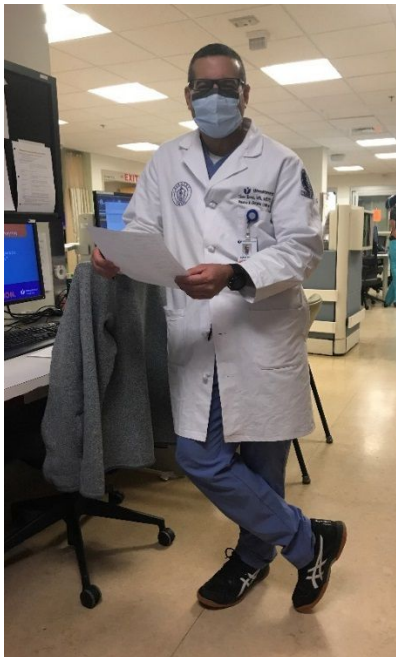


Photo courtesy of Max Hazeltine, MD

## Laugh/Cry

A musical hug from YoYo Ma who recently dedicated the Sarabande from Bach's Cello Suite No. 3 to the healthcare workers on the frontlines, noting "Your ability to balance human connection and scientific truth in service of us all gives me hope."

[https://twitter.com/YoYo\\_Ma/status/1239624123069890566/video/1](https://twitter.com/YoYo_Ma/status/1239624123069890566/video/1)

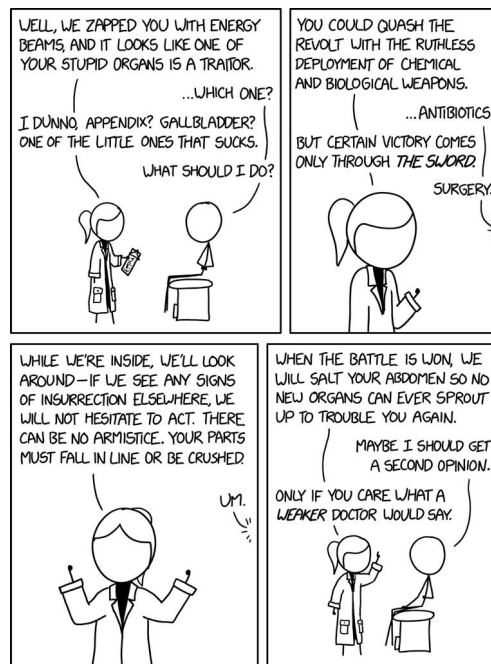
As surgeons, our skills are critical. Check out these skills....brought to you by Dr. Ashley Russo:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/ZE2ACvTm5xNvfjk6A>

Courtesy of DJ Dr. Gil Freitas, always bringing to you a smile and a virtual hug (and real hugs when we aren't having a pandemic), here are your weekly "pick you up" playlists:

<https://music.apple.com/us/playlist/have-a-great-day/pl.u-dEOLskxzK9>

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/37i9dQZF1DX7KNKjOK0o75?si=e5Gs6EoBQpyIqf5OH2uWbA>



Awesome find courtesy of Hannah Buettner, MD PGY2/Research, General Surgery

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

**Virtual Peer Support** drop-in sessions are available to all caregivers to share their experiences and decompress with mutual support and understanding. Sessions will be offered: Monday to Friday, 8 to 8:30 am and 1 to 1:30 pm; Monday, Wednesday and Friday 5 to 5:30 pm. To access the sessions, log in to this Zoom meeting. <https://umassmed.zoom.us/j/108887416>

**Caregiver Support Line:** Caregivers seeking peer support, family services, mental health resources, spiritual care, help finding online wellness resources, or who just want to talk can call 508-334-HELP.

**Coaching:** Brought to you by Mo Kasti's group, which focuses on physician leadership development, the website [www.thehealthcareheroes.com](http://www.thehealthcareheroes.com) will honor health care workers on the front line of the COVID19 pandemic. The group is also offering **free coaching**. If you feel that you could benefit from coaching during this difficult period, please reach out and we can link you in.

**Café Zoom:** The University of Massachusetts Medical School Student Body Committee has opened Café Zoom, a new 24/7 online BYOCoffee Shop opened to serve the virtual UMass Campus. Cafe Zoom is a multipurpose online gathering space that can function as a yoga studio, virtual bar, game room, arcade, movie theater, at-home-gym, study hall, and any other place you wish to visit! Everyone should feel free to organize events and add them to the Calendar. Cafe Zoom is designed so that anyone is able to join without host privileges. If you have an event, add it to the Calendar and encourage others to log-on and join in by posting about your event in the Facebook group and/or inviting your friends. The organizers' hope is that opening of **Cafe Zoom** will strengthen the sense of community and remind everyone that though we are physically distanced, we are still socially together.

Zoom Link:

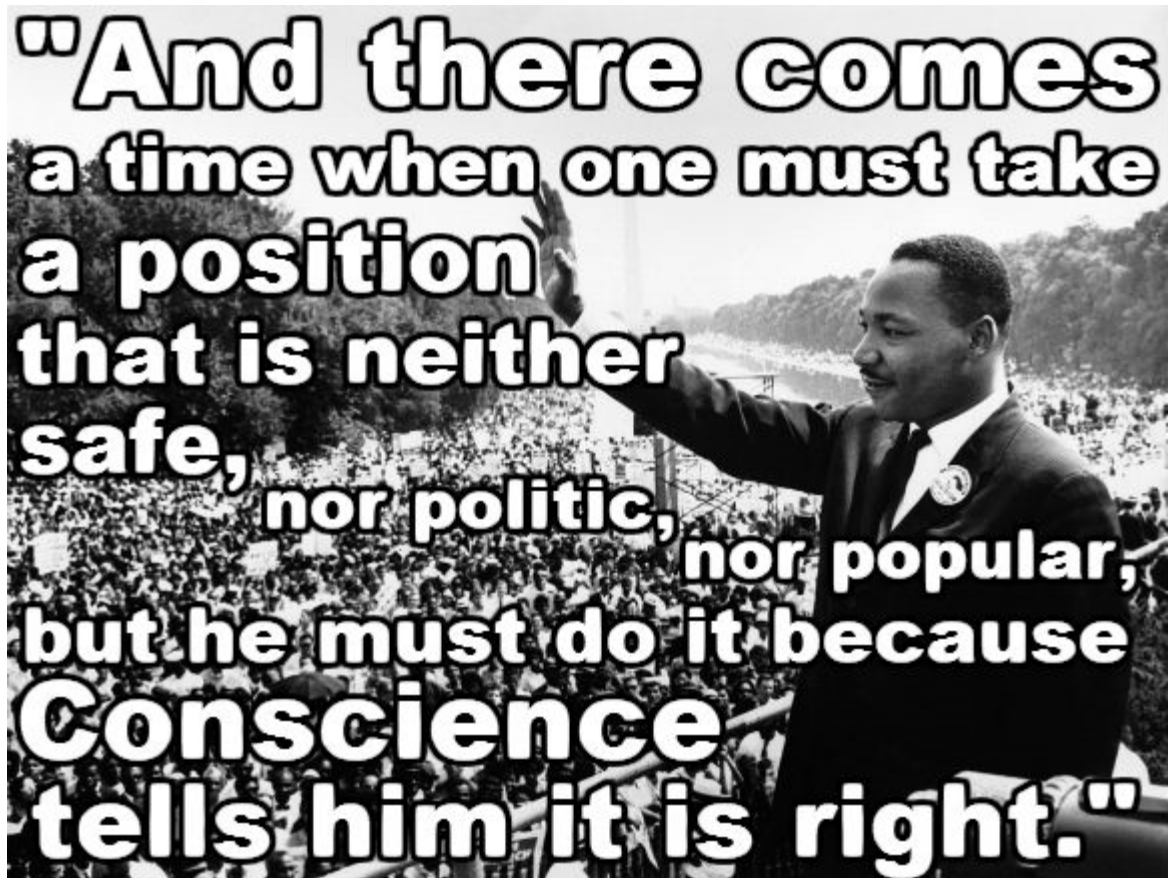
<https://umassmed.zoom.us/j/2917767978?pwd=d2JySksyZksvRXBvaDMwVXVJS3U4Zz09>

**(Meeting ID: 291-776-7978; Password: 844364)**

### **Closing Thoughts**

Contributions welcome from all of the members of our Department of Surgery, which will be sent weekly through the acute phase of the pandemic. Please send your everyday hero highlights, front line (or even from home) perspectives, reflections, photos, ideas, ANYTHING, to

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfoo-phEATjoc7DwWXN8wiCCnHpxwpd8gY0J\\_hDtCQIfKY\\_IQ/viewform?usp=pp\\_url](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfoo-phEATjoc7DwWXN8wiCCnHpxwpd8gY0J_hDtCQIfKY_IQ/viewform?usp=pp_url)

A black and white photograph of Martin Luther King Jr. speaking to a large crowd. He is wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie, and has a small circular badge on his lapel. He is gesturing with his right hand raised. The background shows a large crowd of people and some trees. The quote is overlaid in large, bold, white text with a black outline.

**"And there comes  
a time when one must take  
a position  
that is neither  
safe,  
nor politic,  
nor popular,  
but he must do it because  
Conscience  
tells him it is right."**