



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Breathe Deeply

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

Is it just me, or is the world spinning a little faster than usual?

- Keeping up with the healthcare reform wave of the moment is nearly impossible.
- Retail clinics have been back in the headlines, and often confused with urgent care centers.
- Existing state laws supersede new federal laws, except when they don't.
- Seasonal flu season is upon us. The H1N1 vaccination campaign is in motion.
- Patients are confused about which shots they need and which shots they have already gotten.
- Waiting rooms are full.
- Plane tickets need to be booked for the Fall Conference.
- And what about holiday shopping?

It's enough to make you run for the hills, at the time when you absolutely cannot get time off to do so. Some days it seems there's not even enough room to breathe.

You already know the rest of the story; stress does all kinds of things to the body you aren't even noticing—and it has consequences. It's not your imagination that you are less patient, not eating as well, not sleeping as well, having a hard time concentrating and so on.

Guess what? Your patients are experiencing the same stress levels for exactly the same reasons. Put you both together in an exam room or registration area...well, you know the rest.

Given that, odds are good you are just now reading this October column in January!

My point this month is to remind you to stop (even if for just 30 seconds) and breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out... It makes an immedi-

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ate difference, you already know how to do it, there's no sweating involved, and it's free. The hard part is remembering that taking the 30 seconds is really, really worth it.

Happily, it's often easy to see in others what we can't see in ourselves—so I suggest you make a pact with your colleagues. Watch out for each other and your patients, and have a “Three Breaths” password to tell someone it's both okay and important for them to stop and take that 30 seconds. Five seconds in, five seconds out, repeat, repeat. In all seriousness, it could save a life.

For so many of your current incoming patients, this may be the only time they see any kind of medical professional all year—even if it's “just” for their flu shot. Remember that. Keep your eyes and ears open, and help them to focus on their health for just a couple of minutes. Your short visit may be the only chance they have to understand that their ongoing small problem could be a sign of something more serious. Training yourself to help them slow down for three breaths may make all the difference in the world.

I read a quote recently (a Chinese proverb) that appealed to both the gardener in me and the longing for a little more peace in the world. It went:

“The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second best time is now.”

We are in the now—and if you miss this one, there will be a new one almost immediately following. Don't miss that one. ■



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