



# Together we Live with Cancer!



*TLC is a "Supportive Community" that provides cancer survivors, their families, friends and caregivers with health and wellness opportunities for the body, mind, heart and spirit.*

TLC Supportive Newsletter – April, 2020

***"Science is the greatest collective endeavor."***

- United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organizations website ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org))

## **PART I: THE WORLD ACCORDING TO TIM:**



### **Answering the Question "What Do I Do?" Amidst the Coronavirus!**

*By Tim E. Renzelmann*

In his recent article, "Coping with Isolation," Philip Chard reminds us that "Talking out loud or writing about things we find disturbing alleviates stress."

You can read the full article here:

<https://shepherdexpress.com/advice/out-of-my-mind/coping-with-social-isolation/>

I whole-heartedly agree.

Like Chard, I have always found the writing process (i.e., journaling, expressive writing) to be an effective coping strategy throughout much of my life including my personal cancer experience as well as other life challenges over the years and through to current times.

When I feel myself becoming overwhelmed by a rapid and never-ending stream of fearful and anxiety-ridden thoughts and uncertainty I find it helpful to put my thoughts into words. I can only write (or type) so fast... so the deliberate act of writing (or typing) forces me to slow my thinking and often brings some much-needed calmness to

the moment and, eventually, greater clarity to my thoughts.

What brings me to my keyboard on this occasion is not cancer but the current coronavirus pandemic that is currently gripping our community, our nation and our world. Not surprisingly, it brings with it many of the same difficult thoughts and emotions that can arise throughout the cancer experience: fear, disbelief, anxiety, sadness and bewilderment that can be gradual or sudden and overwhelming as we find ourselves facing a variety of actual, perceived or potential losses (temporary or permanent) related to health, livelihood, income, independence and the ability to do the things that give us purpose, meaning and enjoyment.

There is, I suspect, a familiarity with all of this to many cancer patients and survivors. A common and reasonable response amidst such times of uncertainty (whether it be a cancer diagnosis or a pandemic) is simply, "What do I do?"

Before I proceed, I would like to note one very distinct difference I see between approaching the "What do I do?" question as it relates to the current global pandemic compared to approaching it as it relates to a personal cancer diagnosis. The former due to its infectious nature much more directly involves the health, safety and well-being of family, friends, neighbors,

**H. Marshall Matthews, M.D.**  
*Oncology/Hematology*  
920-458-7433

1621 N Taylor Drive, Suite 100  
Sheboygan, WI 53081  
[www.moa-scbs.com](http://www.moa-scbs.com)

**S. Mark Bettag, M.D.**  
*Oncology/Hematology*  
920-452-1650

community members and fellow inhabitants of this earth. What I choose to do regarding my own cancer diagnosis most directly impacts my own health and well-being. What I choose to do in response to COVID-19 may more dramatically impact the health and well-being of many more! Personally, the stakes are similar... communally, the stakes are much greater.

“What can I do?” can be a tough question to answer especially when we consider the contrasting nature of COVID-19. There is the contrast in symptoms of the virus that range from being so mild that the carrier may not even realize he or she has contracted the virus to the increasing numbers who have paid the ultimate personal price. There is the contrast in responses from those who have made little (if any) changes in their social behaviors to those who are taking extreme steps and precautions. There is the contrast in opinions that range from those who feel we are doing far too little to those who suggest we are over-reacting.

Over time, we will gain a better understanding of this virus. That, of course, won't happen by chance... but through science. It is times like these that we should all be reminded of the importance of science in our everyday lives. I am not a scientist. Admittedly, I lack the intellect and the discipline. But I do know enough about science and the scientific process to know it takes time!

So, In the meantime, what do I do?

While the medical and the scientific communities do what they need to do to confront this pandemic, perhaps now is an opportune time for us *non-scientists* to take the time and make the effort to develop a better understanding of and a greater appreciation for science. College students are offered appreciation classes in art, literature, music and more. And yet I have never seen a “Science Appreciation” class!?!

Allow me to share this description from the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organizations website ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)) that speaks to something we may often take for granted – the vital role of “Science for Society”:

*Science is the greatest collective endeavor. It contributes to ensuring a longer and healthier life, monitors our health, provides medicine to cure our diseases, alleviates aches and pains, helps us to provide water for our basic needs – including our food, provides energy and makes life more fun,*

*including sports, music, entertainment and the latest communication technology. Last but not least, it nourishes our spirit.*

*Science generates solutions for everyday life and helps us to answer the great mysteries of the universe. In other words, science is one of the most important channels of knowledge. It has a specific role, as well as a variety of functions for the benefit of our society: creating new knowledge, improving education, and increasing the quality of our lives.*

*Science must respond to societal needs and global challenges. Public understanding and engagement with science, and citizen participation including through the popularization of science are essential to equip citizens to make informed personal and professional choices. Governments need to make decisions based on quality scientific information on issues such as health and agriculture, and parliaments need to legislate on societal issues which necessitate the latest scientific knowledge. National governments need to understand the science behind major global challenges such as climate change, ocean health, biodiversity loss and freshwater security.*

*To face sustainable development challenges, governments and citizens alike must understand the language of science and must become scientifically literate. On the other hand, scientists must understand the problems policy-makers face and endeavor to make the results of their research relevant and comprehensible to society.*

*Challenges today cut across the traditional boundaries of disciplines and stretch across the lifecycle of innovation -- from research to knowledge development and its application. Science, technology and innovation must drive our pursuit of more equitable and sustainable development.*

Even if we are not scientists, we owe it to ourselves and to our fellow earthly inhabitants (humans and non-humans alike) to, at the very least, become scientifically literate about issues, such as COVID-19, so we can act reasonably, intelligently and for the greater good. We must understand what science is, recognize science for what it does and allow and empower science to do what it can do.

Science may not have all of the answers and it is probable that some of the answers of science may be wrong. But science, far-more-oft-than-not, points us in the right direction!

## **PART II: MY TWO CENTS WORTH:**



### **CENT-iments on Humility, Respect and Empathy!**

*By Tim E. Renzelmann*

As I've pondered how we (as individuals, groups, communities, a society and from a global perspective have responded to this pandemic, a couple CENT-sational stories, stories that I have shared before, although I can no longer recall their origins, come to mind. These are stories that, not surprisingly, are related to that meager little coin that I often turn to for a greater CENTS of understanding.

The first story is that of a mathematics instructor who was trying to teach his students the elements of probability by conducting a simple experiment that involved flipping a coin. The class tallied, with each flip, how many times "heads" came up and how many times "tails" came up. Allegedly, on one of those flips, the coin fell to the floor, bounced a few times and then started to roll until it came to rest... not "heads"... not "tails"... but on its "edge"!

I'd be curious how the instructor explained this unexpected result. Assuming that he/she was proficient in this discipline, I would still find it difficult to believe that, at any point while he or she prepared for class, there was any consideration of a third option beyond "heads" or "tails." So, perhaps more important than WHAT explanation was given is HOW it was given - with a bit of humility, I would hope. We often don't know or fail to consider the possibilities.

So, please, practice humility!

Most would reasonably assume that, even if you account for the remote chance of the coin landing on its "edge," the chances of "heads" versus "tails" is an equal 50/50.

Did you know, however, that the modern cent has an advantage of landing "tails" if the coin is flipped to the ground (and not caught in the air)? The design of the obverse (front) of the coin consists of slightly more metallic content than that of the reverse (back) of the coin. Thus, the coin is ever-so-slightly weighted on the "heads" side which results in a slight tendency for this heavier side to land downward (resulting in "tails").

I am not suggesting that I am a penny "expert." There are certainly others out there who know far more about various aspects of this coin than I do.

However, there are some who may know more about some things than others. Knowing even trivial characteristics of the One Cent piece is real and can make a difference. It makes CENTS to consider the knowledge and opinions of those with specific experience and expertise.

So please... be humble and respect the experts (especially expert organizations and/or when the majority of experts agree)!

I would like to share one last CENT-iment with you before I finish this piece. I have no penny-related story with which to make my point... but I do have the words of presidential historian and Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Doris Kearns Goodwin who, in her book titled *Team of Rivals*, describes the empathy of "the man on the penny" (Abraham Lincoln's). Goodwin writes:

*"Mr. Lincoln possessed extraordinary empathy – the gift or curse of putting himself in the place of another, to experience what they were feeling, to understand their motives and desires."*

*"Even as a child," she went on to explain, "he was uncommonly tender-hearted. He once stopped and tracked back half a mile to rescue a pig caught in a mire--not because he loved the pig, recollected a friend, "just to take a pain out of his own mind."*

Opinion Contributors Mark Brennan, Dana Winters and Pat Dolan, in an article titled "We're All First Responders Amid Coronavirus, Armed with Kindness, Compassion and Empathy," that appeared in *USA Today* wrote:

*"Through our research and professional experience, we know one key thing: In times of emergency, providing empathy, kindness and compassion to our fellow citizens is the single most important factor in surviving the initial stages of disaster, limiting suffering, protecting the vulnerable, and quickly recovering in the aftermath of the crisis."*

What do you do? I offer these CENTS-ible suggestions:

- Be humble!
- Respect the experts (especially expert organizations and/or when the majority of experts agree)!
- Practice Empathy!

As Always,

Tim