



The good news for the start of 2021 and the end of 2020, one of the most challenging periods in recent history, is that COVID-19 vaccinations are underway across the country and worldwide.

As more people are vaccinated, we are getting closer to returning to our normal activities.

But our hopes are tempered by an apparent growing COVID-19 fatigue. The pandemic is taking an emotional and physical toll on physicians, nurses, healthcare professionals and other hospital workers. The stress of long hours, adherence to added safety precautions, fear of contaminating loved ones, and the isolation of caring for sick patients who are dying of COVID-19 due to few available treatments all contribute to the weariness of this situation.

**And, yet, medical professionals have responded to this crisis with resilience and compassion.**

2020 was a year to survive, not only in terms of not succumbing to the deadly virus, but also for healthcare professionals to rise to the challenge of performing well under the most difficult of circumstances every day. Burnout rates were already high among physicians and other healthcare professionals before the COVID-19 pandemic. Those rates have not improved overall and have increased for female physicians and certain specialties over the past year, according to a [recent survey](#).

In ISMIE's first [webinar on physician wellness](#) during the pandemic, Jonathon Ripp, MD, Chief Wellness Officer at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai, New York City, spoke about the needs of healthcare professionals during this anxiety-filled time. Dr. Ripp co-authored an article on this subject for [JAMA](#) that outlines how healthcare professionals need to be heard, protected, prepared, supported and cared for during this time.

**Try to keep a perspective on what matters most in your life, not what's pressuring you right now.**

**How does one move from surviving to thriving in this environment?**

**Here are a few tips – you'll notice that these ideas are not that different from what you might counsel a patient to do during tough times.**

**Focus on what you can control.**

In another recent ISMIE webinar on [Bite-Sized Coping Strategies During Times of Uncertainty](#) featuring J. Bryan Sexton, Ph.D., director of the Duke Patient Safety Center, he reminded us that stress comes from the things you can't predict or control.



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## How does one move from surviving to thriving in this environment? (continued)

### So, what can you control in your life?

Practice good health behaviors such as eating a healthy diet, exercising and getting enough sleep, when possible. Cut down on screen time and limit alcohol consumption. It's important to set appropriate boundaries to hedge against burnout. Although we often experience stress over what's happening to us today, it's helpful to take a step back and look at the big picture. Will what's happening today matter tomorrow, next week or next year? Try to keep a perspective on what matters most in your life, not what's pressuring you right now.



**Self-care.** Have compassion for yourself while caring for others. Physicians and other healthcare professionals are taught to take care of others first. You need to make sure you're taking care of your own physical and mental health in order to be your best at home and on the job.

According to this article from Brigham & Women's Hospital, you should "monitor yourself for excessive fatigue, irritability, poor concentration or marked anxiety." Take time to recharge your batteries. Make sure you have personal space and time for yourself occasionally, as well.



**Gratitude.** As American historian and author Alice Morse Earle wrote, "Every day may not be good... but there's something good in every day."

Reflect on your personal gratitude for what is good in your life and look for uplifting stories of triumphs over challenges. Dr. Sexton has conducted [research studies](#) showing that brief sessions of gratitude are associated with higher levels of happiness and lower levels of depression. He advises to start small on your journey of cultivating hope and building resilience.

What do you have that without it would be tougher to cope? Maybe it's your child, partner, family, friends, pets, neighborhood, faith community, work colleagues, music or books. Or perhaps it's something you're looking forward to doing post-pandemic. Holding on to the hope of seeing loved ones again or going on that trip may help get you through these tough times.

**Stay connected.** Social contact is more important than ever. Although you may not be able to physically be with your family and friends, you can stay connected via the telephone, video communication platforms, emails, and social media. Adding some variety may help if you mix-up who you talk to on particular days. Make a list of colleagues, friends and family you'd like to connect with and then follow through by making those calls.

Take advantage of warm weather days and get outside to meet your friends or other fellow work colleagues you see less frequently due to the pandemic. An outdoor walk or meeting in a park while wearing your mask and maintaining social distance may be a welcome break from your patient load and EHR charting.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers a [substantial list of resources](#) on healthy ways to cope with stress and also provides important contact information for crisis help including suicide prevention, domestic violence and substance abuse hotline numbers.

### Additional resources:

ISMIE provides information on physician wellbeing: [ISMIE Wellness Center](#)

American Psychological Association COVID-19 Resources: <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/>

American Psychiatric Association COVID-19 Resources: <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/covid-19-coronavirus>

National Institute on Mental Health COVID-19 Coping Resources:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/education-awareness/shareable-resources-on-coping-with-covid-19.shtml>

National Center for PTSD – COVID-19 Resources for Healthcare Workers: [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/list\\_healthcare\\_responders.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/list_healthcare_responders.asp)

### About ISMIE

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