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Sustainability and Emergency Medicine.....odd bedfellows?

I started thinking about the connections between issues of sustainability and my own field of emergency medicine because of my interest in physician wellness. I applied for the Piedmont Project with the intuition that I would learn valuable lessons, but not really having any idea at all what those lessons would be. As I listened to the Piedmont speakers talk about the natural environment, the built environment, and the food we eat, I tried hard to join the dots between these concerns, and the men and women who rush around Emergency Departments trying to take care of people, whilst trying, and often failing, to take care of themselves. One line I heard made it click in my head, in the process of trying to define what sustainability is trying to address, a speaker asked the question 'what allows us to thrive?', and then I tried to answer the question, 'what allows emergency providers to thrive, and what makes it harder for us to thrive?'.

The people I took the course with were a revelation. They were a very mixed bunch in terms of fields of interest, but uniformly intelligent and generous. They had such varied perspectives on problems and had already thought about some solutions that I needed. I found myself thinking about the built environment of the Emergency Department, the use of light and mindful spaces within an often mindless chaotic place, the diet we eat to sustain ourselves on shift, the way we sustain our bodies with exercise in biking to work, the social capital of our relationships at work that make us resilient. I found that in order to sustain ones-self, you have to sustain the people and the environment

around you. I have brought these beliefs with me in the delivery of a new wellness curriculum that has been developed by myself and my colleague Michelle Lall in the Department of Emergency Medicine. I aim to infuse this new curriculum and the work experience of our residents with a constant mindful reiteration of the question, 'What allows us to thrive'.

Wellness Curriculum

The wellness curriculum is a new initiative that I will be co-delivering to our second year emergency medicine residents. We have already set the staff for delivering the curriculum with a successful first session, and in the open discussion component of the session the residents identified a strong connection between the social capital of their work relationships and their wellness. Moving forward there are set topics that will be delivered, and each topic will be influenced by the question 'What allows us to thrive?'. Issues of sustainability will infuse the topics, and the Piedmont Project has invigorated my efforts to encourage residents and faculty to take breaks on shift in order to sustain themselves physically so that a high standard of medical care can be delivered by staff who feel well and are well nourished. We will also discuss how the built environment of the ED affects our wellness, and how we can make connections between a sustained environment and our own personal wellness

Wellness sessions – Delivery Site;Excel Center at the School Of Medicine.

- 8/2 Intro to Wellness
- 9/25 Focus Groups with residents on taking breaks in the ED
- 10/4 Conflict Mode Instrument – Sustainable relationships
- 11/1 Self-care, the food we eat and how it sustains you.
- 1/3 Mindfulness, emotional regulation on shift, negotiation
- 3/7 Positive coping strategies, demands of professionalism
- 5/2 Personal Wellness, you and your environment - reflection

There is no assessment component to the course in terms of grading. Residents will attend as part of their commitment to a weekly resident education conference. However, we are planning a session evaluation and a detailed end-of-program evaluation that is aimed at evolving the curriculum so that it can be delivered again for the next year. During this evolution we will identify further opportunities for the ethos of sustainability to inform our curriculum.