

To the UW Medicine Community:

“The Patio is Open.” The sign in front of the bistro down the block caught me off guard this week. Are we ready for this? I have felt a dissonance between a pull to feel normal rhythms again and knowing that our battle against COVID-19 is far from over.

My own uncertainty about the future, a possible resurgence, the stress I feel seeing folks standing too close together — it makes me reflect on the challenging spot we find ourselves in as a UW Medicine community. COVID-19, systemic racism and unrest affect us in myriad ways at home, at work and in our communities. For those of us who used to come to work to escape the challenges in the world outside and who traveled home to get a break from a hard day in our unit, lab or office — we now find that there is no escape and that the weight of what we do not have control over is heavy on our shoulders.

What we do have control over is making sure we all do our part to make sure that everyone feels welcome within UW Medicine, which can feel like a tall order in a tense and quickly changing environment. When we sense threats, our human response is often to make our sense of an “us” smaller; to constrict our circle and conserve our caring to a small few. However, in this moment, we have an opportunity to redefine our “us” to something much bigger, that encompasses every member of our community, including those whose life journeys are dramatically different from ours.

This month, I have been moved to see our collective sense of “us” grow in real time: as colleagues of all races and ethnicities marched in support of racial justice; as the young and old knelt in silence to acknowledge so many lives lost; as straight allies celebrated the Supreme Court’s landmark ruling this week affording workplace protections for LGBTQ+ workers under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Milestones like this remind us that it is possible to hold both pain and celebration in the same moment, and of what is possible when we can hold them together. They also create a chance to reflect on the ways in which legal and lived equality are not the same, and of the urgent role we are called to play in bridging the gap, to create a culture of belonging.

As I watch colleagues across UW Medicine grieve, celebrate, call for change together — across their differences — I think of what will be possible as we grow our sense of “us.” As we move through and beyond the challenges of this time, showing up for one another will be essential to dismantle the systems of oppression that affect us all — and to ensure our collective liberation. To create a culture where colleagues can live safe and openly, no matter who they are, whom they love or what led them to become part of our community, we must proactively expand our definition of “us.”

Lessons Learned: As we move forward, we want to capture some of what we have learned over the last four months. Please spend 15 minutes taking our [COVID-19 Lessons Learned Survey](#) to help us understand how we can continue to support you now and how we can best plan for challenges in the future.

Town Halls: We will continue to gather as a community to share information and answer your [questions](#) during our Town Halls. Our next Town Hall will be next week, [June 26 at 3 pm](#). Our future town halls will be held monthly on July 10, August 7 and September 4.

Peer and Mental Health Support: Many of our healthcare team members know how to be “fine” and white-knuckle their way through incredible challenges. We have been trained to be okay. Knowing how hard the stress, uncertainty and loss of control is on all of us now, we want to encourage you to seek out the supports around you. From a [peer support](#) session as you come off of service to a free [supportive conversation](#) with our Psychiatry clinician colleagues, we are here to help. For more immediate support for yourself or a colleague, please contact our employee assistance program: [UW CareLink](#). It is okay to acknowledge just how hard this time is and to give and receive support now and in the future.

It is on us as a community to connect across our differences and show up for each other in ways that define the inclusive “us” that we want to be moving forward. Let’s continue to do this work together.

With gratitude,

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