

TO YOUR HEALTH

Volume 29, Number 6

June

June 2024

Finding Meaning in All Stages of Life

By Marcia Feldman, Palliative Care Coordinator

What gives your life meaning? How have your priorities changed since your younger years? What is most meaningful to you now? Though our priorities can certainly change over time, it remains important in all stages of life to have meaning and purpose in our lives.

At Carleton Willard, The Mighty Nineties group was asked, *Are there any secrets to a long life?* Their answers were: having a plan/purpose, having the courage to recognize when we need help and receiving help, and having something to look forward to.

Love and Connection

We are social beings by nature that need connection to stay healthy. We learned this all too recently during the pandemic that kept us apart from each other. In the 2023 Surgeon Generals report, *"Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation"*, the relationship between health/well-being and social connection is described. The findings of research from several different scientific fields came to the same conclusion: *"social connection is a significant predictor of longevity and better physical, cognitive, and mental health, while social isolation and*

loneliness are significant predictors of premature death and poor health." How can we nurture and care for our precious relationships with loved ones to insure that they remain healthy?

Pleasant life
enjoying daily pleasures

Happiness

Good life
using skills for enrichment

Meaningful life
contributing to the greater good

Purpose

In her book, *The Coming of Age*, Simone de Beauvoir, suggests that we *"go on pursuing ends that give our life a meaning—devotion to individuals, to collectives, to causes, social, political, intellectual or creative work."*

On the subject of the health impact of finding purpose and meaning in life, the writer M.T. Connolly in the book *"The Measure of Our Age"* said, *"What we know about the measurable benefits of purpose keep expanding. It lowers risks of stroke, heart disease, and dementia; it improves quality of life, sleep, heart health, walking speed, and grip strength; and it lengthens both life span and health span."*

Awe

As a child, did you ever lay on the grass and look up at the stars or the clouds and feel awe in the vastness of the universe? Does the beauty of a sunset still



leave you speechless? In 1968, when the astronauts took the first photo of our planet from space called Earthrise, the poet Archibald MacLeish wrote, *"To see the earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the earth together."* What continues to inspire awe in you now?

Keep it Moving

We all know the importance of exercise to retain mobility and strength. In order to stay as independent as possible - taking walks and exercise classes, eating a healthy diet, and getting enough sleep are essential to staying fit. Self care of our bodies is crucial to having energy to continue doing the things we want to do as we age.

Storytelling

In our later years, it can be enriching to look back on our lives and tell the meaningful stories of our past. Some stories may engender pride in our accomplishments and some may bring up places in our hearts that need healing. Both lighter and difficult stories can be valuable to revisit. There are many ways to tell a story; verbally with another person, by videotaping an interview, by creating artwork or poetry, through composing music or in journal writing. Life review can be an effective way to come to peace with the past and feel contentment with the present.

In January a media memoir writing group was launched at Carleton Willard, led by Kate Hanlon. Participants have been creating journals to tell the stories of their lives in an artistic way. According to Hanlon, *"Journaling gives us an opportunity to reflect upon and record these narratives, which may be represented with text and images using drawing, painting, collage or embroidery, bringing our personal stories to life."*

Meaning as a Guidance for Care

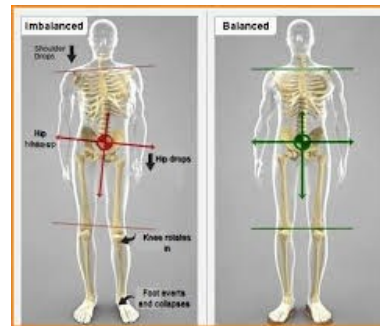
When people with serious illness are asked about what gives their lives meaning, their answers can be a guide to their families and caregivers about what kind of treatment they would want near the end of their lives. For example, when "Being Mortal" author Dr. Atul Gawande's father was facing terminal illness, he was asked about what was important to him. His answer was, *"Well, if I'm able to eat chocolate ice cream and watch football on TV, then I'm willing to stay alive."* This answer then helped his family advocate for him and shaped his medical care through his final days.

There are tools that can help us record what is important to us so we can guide our families and medical team in knowing what care we choose. The Five Wishes is a document that offers a format to collect our thoughts about the care we want. It is available in the clinic and online. There are also websites that provide forms that enable us to record our wishes like www.HonoringChoicesMass.com.

Health Care Lecture

Looser Muscles AND Better Posture with Integrated Positional Therapy (IPT)

**Thursday, June 20 at 2pm
In the Auditorium**



Find out how you can loosen neck, shoulder, back, and leg muscles with these easy, peasy, IPT techniques. Crossing one leg over the other while sitting stretches your IT Band, located on the side of your thigh. Now, that is easy!

Irene Wong is a licensed, massage therapist who has been practicing Amma, a Japanese massage for over thirty years. She also has experience in Polarity which is a type of energy work. For the past eight years, Irene has delved into the world of Integrated Positional Therapy (IPT) which focuses on chronic neuro-muscular pain in the body. This modality was created by Lee Albert, whose repertoire of simple, easy, muscle stretches and relaxation techniques can also help people with every day muscle tightness. Irene's two careers were first as a professional baker and then as a massage therapist. These physically demanding jobs (both she has loved) have helped her learn so much about the body. In return, Irene wants to help others nurture and connect with their own bodies through massage and Integrated Positional Therapy.

Just a Reminder

The Clinic is always happy to accommodate Residents on short notice, however please call the Clinic for a same day visit rather than just dropping in. This will reduce your wait time and the Clinic will be able to better serve you.

- Thank you for helping us with this matter.