



GME Wellness Sub-Committee Newsbyte

No Joke! Laughter as Medicine

2020 has yet to be a year filled with much humor. The changes to our daily life, not to mention the practice of medicine, have simply been overwhelming. Gone are the family gatherings, hang outs with groups of friends, evenings with shows and movies, large group meetings, conferences, handshakes and hugs. With so many of our outlets for comfort, enjoyment and health gone or significantly changed, where else can we look? Perhaps a dose of laughter is what we need!

Charlie Chaplin once stated, “Laughter is the tonic, the relief, the surcease for pain”. Laughter has been shown to have physiologic, psychological, social, spiritual and quality of life benefits. There are very limited adverse effects and no contraindications.

A study of healthy individuals shown clips from *Saving Private Ryan vs. Kingpin* and *There’s Something About Mary* demonstrated a difference in brachial arterial blood flow mediated vasodilation of 50% between the mental stress and laughter groups.¹ Another study of healthy subjects shown a humorous video compared with a tourism video showed increased NK cell activity in those watching the humorous videos. Reported levels of stress were also decreased in the humorous video group.²

Other studies have shown laughter to sooth tension, improve immune system function, relieve pain, connect people and help deal with difficult situations, increase endorphins, improve mood, burn calories and increase blood flow. I can’t imagine finding such a beneficial therapy with so few adverse effects and not prescribing it to my patients and myself!

During these trying times, along with exercise, proper sleep, and good nutrition, perhaps we all need a prescription for laughter. So, go ahead, indulge in old episodes of *The Office* or watch some older movies like *Legally Blonde* or *A-Team*. Pick up a humorous book or a collection of cartoons like *Calvin and Hobbes*. Have a laugh – even better – share it with someone else and your patients!

by Winter Haven Family Medicine Faculty Dr. Ashley Falk

1. Miller M, Mangare C, Park Y, Goel R, Plotnick GD, Vogel RA. Impact of cinematic viewing on endothelial function. *Heart*. 2006;92(2):261-2
2. Bennet. The effect of mirthful laughter on stress and natural killer cell activity. *Altern Ther Health Med*. Mar-Apr 2003;9(2):38-45