

Transcript Details

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How COVID-19 Is Affecting Life Outside of the Office: A Dermatologist's Experience

Dr. Greenberg:

Coming to you from the ReachMD studios, this is *COVID-19: On The Frontlines*. I'm Dr. Michael Greenberg.

For me as a physician and as a human being, what's gonna get me through this is peace of mind, and the best way I know to create peace of mind is, number 1, get out of my head and help somebody else, and number 2, talk about it. This is really important. I have a bunch of colleagues, some doctors, some not, and we meet every couple days, or even sometimes every day, and we just talk to each other about how we're feeling, because the truth of it is I'm pretty calm and pretty chill about this, but inside me there's still a part that feels like it's in freefall, like, "I don't know what's happening today. I don't know if the whole US is gonna get shut down. I don't know if I'm gonna get economically wiped out." All these fears go in my head, and they're like in this freefall. I can't answer them. So expressing them to somebody else really helps. When you share a problem with somebody, you cut your burden by half. I know that's kind of a spiritual cliché, but that's kind of how I'm living these days.

There are many, many groups that are forming online, discussion groups. There are 12-step groups. There are groups of musicians, groups of actors. Find a group. Go online; I've been talking to friends and other doctors around the world, and I think after this pandemic, we're gonna find that the world has opened up a little bit, and maybe we can come to realize that we're a unified planet.

Here's another thing to do. Turn off the news. When every solitary case in a state becomes a breaking news item, it whips up our fear. I think the way we're gonna get through this is to work through those fears. And I talk to patients about with fear when they come in, and this was prior to the virus. I'd have lots of patients who were scared of having a melanoma or having something serious, and I would talk to them about fear being an acronym. The letters stand for Fantasized Events Appearing Real. So people who come to me with a seborrheic keratosis on their arm believe it's a melanoma, and they see themselves dead. When I explain that that's what it means—it also can mean F Everything And Run away, which is not what you wanna do from a fear—I talk to them about staying in the now. The antidote for fear is to stay in the here and now. Ask yourself a question: What's happening now? And I give them the example of 2 guys who jump off of a skyscraper at the same time. And you know what's gonna happen 20 seconds later. However, the guy who lives in his fear screams all the way down. The guy who stays in the moment or in the now as he passes by each floor, he goes, "Well, it's not too bad yet, it's not too bad yet, it's not too bad yet," all the way down. So I tell patients to take an immediate inventory. All right? "What's happening now? Are you infected?" "No." "Do you have clothes on your back?" "Yes." "Do you have food in your stomach?" "Yes." "Do you have a place to shelter?" "Yes." "Are you on the phone or visiting someone that you like to listen to or be with?" "Yeah." "Okay, so it's not too bad in this moment." And that's the first week of really dramatic changes in my life and in my practice.

For ReachMD this is *COVID-19: On the Frontlines*. For continuing access to this and other episodes and to add your perspective towards the fight against this global pandemic visit us at ReachMD.com. Thank you for listening.