Gratitude and Thanks

It is November again! This year seems to have flown by in a blur. Yet, we can probably recall moments and people who made it a great year. Each of us has some meaningful event or people in our lives who make a strong impression on us, even though the precipitation for remembering them isn’t so dramatic. We are grateful for these people and these moments because they help us see the benefit of connections.

Gratitude, defined by Merriam-Webster (2019), is the state of being grateful or thankfulness. If you are a regular reader of The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing, you know that we typically thank our reviewers and board and the publishers who work with us in November. The reason, of course, is that we are thankful for the work they all do. In addition to the public recognition of our team, we benefit personally, according to research findings with which we may not be familiar.

When Emmons and McCullough (2003) published their early studies about gratitude, they elevated the importance of being grateful. In case you are new to the concept of gratitude, however, here is what Emmons and McCullough found. During a 10-week experience, participants were divided into three groups—those who were to write about things they were grateful for; those who were to write about the things that irritated them; and those who just wrote about events (good or bad). In addition to being more optimistic, participants in the group who wrote about positive events were less likely to seek health care services and more likely to exercise than either of the other groups’ participants!

If this Thanksgiving you find yourself focused on shopping the next day, or considering how stressful you think the December holiday season will be, or feeling sad, depressed, alone, or unconnected to others, consider your own 10-week experiment. At the end of the day, instead of planning your next day, add in one small step: record who or what made a positive difference for you today.

Living in today’s world is fairly stressful, so we need to help ourselves as much as possible to see the hope of tomorrow. Being grateful is one strategy.

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