

dear residents

From Remote Work to a Remote Life - Let's Get Social Again

January 19, 2025

Dear Residents,

It's been five years since the emergence of COVID-19. But even before that, we had begun to lose the physical cohesiveness of the residency program. Prior to 2015, Parkland was connected to the medical school at every level, and after 2015, when the hospital relocated across the street, it was connected by a bridge. By way of the old Parkland building, one could travel from new Parkland to the Medical School. Now that the old Parkland building has been demolished, the bridge only takes you to the Sprague building. As a consequence, the three-hospital system has increasingly solidified into three geographically disconnected learning centers. Gathering as a group, which we used to do frequently, has become more challenging. We used to convene for the weekly Potpourri conference in D1.502, but with the closure of the walkway through the old Parkland, Potpourri had to be moved to the WISH building.

At individual sites, we still gather at noon conference, at morning report and in our respective rounding rooms, but not everybody gets to be with everybody else with any degree of regularity. Do we miss spending time together, or have we become accustomed to spending less of it with each other? There are prevailing social trends that have spurred a tendency to spend more time alone. Our leisure time has moved indoors. Streaming services mean that we don't have to go to the movie theater to watch a new release and food delivery services have meant that we can "eat-out" in our own homes. The convenience of Amazon has reduced our trips to the grocery stores and to bookstores while record stores have all but vanished. Our trips to the patient's bedside have been replaced by our constant tether to the Electronic Health Record and in-person conversations have been swapped with Epic Chat. Some of this is an inevitable evolution of patient care, while some of it represents a genuine loss of human connection with our patients and with the patient care team.

Within the residency there are your close friends, an inner circle that you know well. And there are interest groups like health systems and medical education and groups of those who may be collaborating on research projects, but we are still missing larger group interactions. Writing in *The Atlantic*, Derek Thompson laments that we are now in [The Anti-Social Century](#). One passage that caught my attention was his discussion of the three rings that bind us to each other – the inner/intimate ring and the outer/tribal ring appear intact, but we are missing that vital middle ring (the village):

Home-based, phone-based culture has arguably solidified our closest and most distant connections, the inner ring of family and best friends (bound by blood and intimacy) and the outer ring of tribe (linked by shared affinities). But it's wreaking havoc on the middle ring of "familiar but not intimate" relationships

with the people who live around us, which Dunkelman calls the village. “These are your neighbors, the people in your town,” he said. We used to know them well; now we don’t. The middle ring is key to social cohesion, Dunkelman said. Families teach us love, and tribes teach us loyalty. The village teaches us tolerance.



Photo by [Dawn Casey](#) on [Unsplash](#)

I do not want to minimize the importance of solitude which is crucial for self-reflection, creativity, and emotional recharge. It provides a sanctuary to process thoughts, connect with inner emotions, and find clarity amidst the chaos of daily life. But I do feel that we are losing some of our group cohesiveness. I also believe that some form of remote work is here to stay, although it may not be as prevalent in direct patient care settings. Telehealth has undoubtedly become an integral part of healthcare delivery. My takeaway is that we should rebuild the middle ring of the residency program. We should organize more social events and other gatherings, revive some of the sports leagues we once had, and create more venues for faculty and residents to interact. We should head to the bedside more often and wander over to the nursing station. I’m eager to hear your ideas on how to promote greater cohesion and strengthen relationships within the residency program.

It’s going to be a cold week – but it might be fun to meet up with friends for a warm beverage, go to the movies, or check out a [local bookstore](#).

Dino Kazi