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STATE OF THE HEART

Another year ending, another year beginning: for many of us this time is fraught with festive activity and resolution-making. I use this busy time to see lots of patients, spend time with my family and catch up with friends. I also work on preparing for the year to come. Winter nights are perfect for contemplation and I use these quiet times for exactly that. Presidents have the State of the Union Address; I have the State of the Heart to sort through!

More and more studies are showing a correlation between heart disease and depression, particularly for those folks who've experienced a heart attack, stroke or other major cardiac event. I mention this because I find that my patients who have the best quality of life and get the most fulfillment out of their days are those who experience even life-threatening events such as these with an eye to the future and a new appreciation for the past. They get back into their routines but quit smoking, drinking excessively, eating too much or some of the other behaviors that sent them into the hospital in the first place. They take stock of where they've been and go forward with gusto.

Every season I take a "dose of my own medicine," per se, and check how I'm doing on my own bill of health. I make sure I've seen a dentist lately; I have my cholesterol and blood pressure checked. I weigh myself and see how I'm doing with my diet and nutrition. I undergo any and all routine tests suggested to me, and I try hard to boost my exercise routine for a few weeks after the holidays, just to work off the three to five pounds I, as an average American, may have put on due to indulging in too many handfuls of popcorn and sweets.

I also believe that it helps my heart to do a personal inventory of another kind: a happiness inventory. Am I doing the things in life that bring goodness to me, my family, friends, colleagues and patients in the best way I know how? Am I finding ways every day to bring a smile and compassion to my interactions with others? Do I find ways to relax and enjoy myself, enabling me to de-stress and live my life in a fuller, more harmonious way? Do I learn something new everyday; likewise, do I teach someone something new? If I'm tired, do I rest; if I'm sluggish, do I work harder?

Growing up on a farm in rural Kansas has proven essential to my sense of who I am – my work ethic, my fondness for my patients, some of whom I've had the privilege of knowing for over twenty years. I feel a connection to this land like no other place in the world. On my drives to various clinics around the state, I take time to let my mind wander, relax to the music on the radio and view my favorite landscape. As a kid, I used to enjoy my summers on the tractor; and I still appreciate the beauty of the changes in the Kansas seasons. I enjoy the steadfastness of the people I've known for a long time and the surprise of the new people I meet.

So when my patients come to me around this time of year wanting a new plan, a new change, a new regime, I wholeheartedly embrace it. The new diet, the new exercise program, the new hobby, the new volunteer work – all of this is great stuff, and makes for a healthier, more engaged life. But for all the changes that we make and adventures we undertake, I advocate overall balance for my patients. Ancient philosophers knew they were on to something by advising people to stick to the “golden mean” – moderation is really the best course of action in all aspects of health: physically, mentally and emotionally. But when it comes to the spirit and to bringing joy and compassion to your life, there is no “too much.”

Spend some time over the holidays thinking of what really makes your life worthwhile and decide to incorporate more of it. Tell someone you care about that they matter to you; act with kindness and see how your day can change. Take a walk with someone or sit by a fireplace and talk. If there are habits you want to break, strategize and enact a plan to break them and definitely find healthy habits to replace them.

As a long-practicing physician, I have deep reverence for health and have seen more than my share of people’s lives improve because a patient has put the determination, energy and fun back into caring for themselves and others. It’s part of my personal yearly transition, and taking my own health to heart.

Happy, Healthy New Year to All!

Listen to Dr. Galichia’s Radio Show – “Take Your Health to Heart” every Saturday from 11 AM to Noon on 1480 KQAM in Wichita. If you have any medically related questions, please call us during the LIVE broadcast at 1-800-TALK-997 or 1-800-825-5997. You can also e-mail your questions anytime to [**GalichiaRadio@Galichia.com**](mailto:GalichiaRadio@Galichia.com). We would love to hear from you!!!

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