



November, 2019

## INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN RESIDENCY

### WELCOME MESSAGE

Dear Residents, Fellows, and Faculty,

We are pleased to share with you our sixth issue of THRIVE, the WELL Office's e-communication on topics related to physician wellness. The current issue is dedicated to the subject of *Intimate Relationships in Residency*. Certainly, not everyone in residency is currently in a relationship, so our next issue will be dedicated to the topic of being single while in residency, and we will address challenges and advantages, as well as strategies to establish connections, if so desired. Stay tuned!

#### **Intimate Relationships in Residency**

Supportive personal relationships positively influence our long-term health, boosting our happiness, prolonging our longevity, and protecting against health problems (Demir, 2010; Holt-Lunstad, Smith & Layton, 2010). In the context of residency, intimate relationships can assist residents in maintaining well-being, fending off depression, and obtaining help with personal and mental health challenges. However, as most of you know, residency training can significantly strain the quality of your relationships. It can be very challenging to meaningfully connect with a partner, when you are also navigating excessively long work hours, insufficient sleep, time constraints, work-related stress, and fatigue. Additionally, residents' commitment to their medical profession can often supersede the need to nurture and develop their personal relationships. Although this commitment is highly important, relationships can serve as a powerful source of love, joy, and happiness that can further contribute to a successful career and act as a buffer against the stresses of residency.

Given this context, you may wonder: **How can one navigate the demands of training, while also helping one's relationship flourish?** If you are posing yourself this question, we would like to reassure you that you are not alone. In fact, a large number of residents who come to counselling at The WELL Office are actually seeking help with relationship problems.



Sustaining meaningful relationships is a life-long journey that starts with an intention to improving one's relationships with a loving and accepting attitude towards oneself and one's partner. Relationships are complex and involve a combination of self-awareness, love, boundaries, and commitment, amongst other things, to make them work. It is important to become aware of the key

ingredients that can help your relationship thrive.

In this issue, you will find a **fellow's personal story** of navigating the ups and downs of dating while in residency. While we originally aimed to include personal stories from McGill residents, we unfortunately did not receive any entries on this topic, which may point towards a gap in residents' comfort to address this topic and a need to further normalize potential struggles in the relationship domain. The three **academic papers** address challenges of interpersonal relationships while in residency, as well as recommendations to improve these relationships. Two of these articles address the particularities of long-distance relationships and female residents' romantic relationships. We have included a **compassionate love quiz** for you to assess your compassion towards your partner and discover ways to practice greater compassion in your relationship. In the **wellness hub** section, you will find a range of strategies (including our new WELL Office Podcast!) for improving your relationships, such as "quick connection moments", tips for carving out couple time, ways to display gratitude and appreciation, and techniques to improve your communication with your partner.

Warm regards,

Camila Velez, MA & Dr. Martha Chamodraka, PGME Wellness Consultants &  
Dr. Paola Fata, Assistant Dean, Resident Professional Affairs

If you wish to access our past issues, please visit this [page](#)

#### References

Demir, M. (2010). Close relationships and happiness among emerging adults. *Journal of Happiness Studies : An Interdisciplinary Forum on Subjective Well-Being*, 11(3), 293-313. doi:10.1007/s10902-009-9141-x

Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T., & Layton, J. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: A meta-analytic review. *Plos Medicine*, 7(7), 1000316. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316

## NEW WELL OFFICE INITIATIVES AND UPCOMING EVENTS



### The WELL Office Podcast

Join Wellness Consultants, Dr. Jade-Isis Lefebvre and Camila Velez as they discuss wellness-related topics and address common learner questions with a variety of experts. Special appearances will be made by Career Advisor, Elizabeth Lefebvre to talk all things career with learners and professionals in the healthcare field.

Please click [here](#) to listen!



### Yoga on the Go!

The WELL Office has teamed up with International yoga pioneer and Physical Therapist, Lara Heimann to bring you efficient, time-friendly workouts designed specifically for McGill Health Professional Learners. LYT™ (Lara's Yoga Technique) is a sophisticated method of practice that is based on the three principles of Physiology, Kinesiology and Neurology. With a core understanding of movement from a cellular level while highlighting the mechanics of how movement happens, LYT™ is an intense movement experience that systematically overrides the patterns of compensation and poor habits through an exploration of brain mapping and purposeful movement.

Click [here](#) to experience the first of several videos, Energy Boost and On Rotation and stay tuned for more in the weeks to come!



## Learners' Art Exhibition at The WELL Office– Spring 2020!

We are calling for art submissions!

The Learners' Art Exhibition will bring together artists from different programs and provide them with an opportunity to display and share the power of art to the community. Creative arts are a powerful way to foment learners' empathy, self-awareness, curiosity, critical-thinking skills, and ability to deal with the diverse emotions associated with an education and career in the Health Professions.

For submission form and more information click [here](#)

**DEADLINE to submit:**

**December 20th, 2019**

## TALK ABOUT PERSPECTIVE: RESIDENTS' CORNER

### Dating During Residency

#### Podcast: Married to Doctors

“Lara talks with an engaged couple about the ups and downs of dating during medical training. Jennifer Rodney and Kade Poulson met while she was a third-year otolaryngology resident in Oklahoma City and he was working as a research services coordinator at the University of Oklahoma Department of Research in Norman. They enjoy traveling, working out and watching movies together. Jennifer left Oklahoma to do a laryngology fellowship in Nashville while Kade continues to work in Oklahoma. They will be getting married at the end of the summer after she finishes fellowship.”

Click [here](#) to listen!

## ACADEMIC PAPERS

Law, M., Lam, M., Wu, D., Veinot, P., & Mylopoulos, M. (2017). Changes in personal relationships during residency and their effects on resident wellness: A qualitative study. *Academic Medicine: Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, *92*(11), 1601–1606.

doi:10.1097/ACM.0000000000001711

[VIEW ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE](#)

Wang, F., & Myers, J. (2018). Strategies for residency programs to enhance personal relationships and prevent resident burnout. *Academic Medicine: Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, *93*(2), 151–152. doi:10.1097/ACM.0000000000002030

[VIEW ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE](#)

Wang, Y., Hsu, K., Chang, C., & Wu, C. (2012). Interrelationships between romance, life quality, and medical training of female residents. *Journal of the Chinese Medical Association*, *75*(8), 402–8. doi:10.1016/j.jcma.2012.06.009

[VIEW ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE](#)

## THRIVE QUIZ

Compassionate Love Quiz

[QUIZ](#)

## WELLNESS HUB

### SELF-HELP TOOLBOX

#### Tips for Healthier Relationships



Providing tips on fomenting the quality of romantic relationships can be tricky, as relationships are very unique and each partner brings their individual history and identities into the relationship dynamics. At the same time, relationships take different forms and vary regarding level of commitment, physical distance, duration, number of partners involved, etc. With this variability in mind, we would like

to address some themes that can contribute to more meaningful and attuned relationship dynamics.

#### Carve out time:

1. Given the demands of residency, you may often feel you have no control over your schedule and have little time and energy to give to your partner. Consider sitting down with your partner once per week to look at your schedules and plan designated times to meet for activities, connection moments, skype/facetime dates (e.g., watching a movie together online), and date nights. Having a visual representation of your schedules can help you find moments to spend time together and can give you something exciting to look forward to.
2. It can be very challenging to schedule large blocks of time with your partner. During this times, it is important to get creative in order to show your partner that they are still a priority. For example, some residents apply the **24-hour rule**. This involves connecting with your partner at least once within 24 hours. For example, you can send them a quick text saying you miss them, you can make a quick call, or you can send them a funny video just to let them know that they are on your mind. This requires a small amount of effort and energy, but it can go a long way in fostering connection.

#### Foster feelings of appreciation:

1. You can demonstrate your love for your partner by committing yourself to intentional acts of appreciation, which can foster emotional closeness. For example,

you can complement your partner, write them a cute note, get them their favorite dessert, and thank your partner for their efforts. These actions can seem small, but communicate very much and can serve as a powerful way to keep relationships alive and well. For some ideas click this [link!](#)

2. When you are spending time with your partner, try to be **fully present** and disconnect from work. You can mindfully set this intention before meeting with your partner. Become fully immersed in the moment by listening attentively, asking questions, responding with curiosity and interest, and communicating with openness. You can also show feelings of appreciation by taking turns in activities so that both partners can have their needs recognized and met. For more information on how to practice being present, take a look at Tony Robbin's [blog!](#)

### Work on your communication:

1. It is important to communicate your hopes, feelings, and needs to your partner. While not always easy, allowing your partner to see the reality of your emotional world can help them provide compassion and understanding and vice versa. Creating a safe and respectful space to communicate needs with kindness and acceptance, can lead to greater empathy, reassurance, closeness, and problem solving and compromising, when needed. This [video](#) gives some ideas about how to communicate our needs effectively with a partner.



2. Practice self-awareness and be transparent with yourself about when you may be engaging in communication styles that can harm the relationship. When we notice challenges in our relationship, we can have the tendency of creating walls, avoiding difficult subjects, criticizing our partner, or distance ourselves because we are trying our best to protect ourselves from pain. However, these coping styles are more likely to lead to further feelings of alienation and disconnection. Work on co-creating a safe spaces, where you can be vulnerable with each other. This [video](#) on the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse (Gottman) gives more information on styles of communication that can hurt a relationship.
3. Give yourself permission to consult with a professional (e.g., [wellness consultant](#), psychologist, counsellor, couple's counsellor) if you notice challenges in your relationship that are proving very difficult to navigate.

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## Podcasts



The WELL Office podcast. [Episode 2: / Love You But I Don't Have Time](#)

Camila and Jade welcome Thomas Khullar (PhD candidate in Clinical Psychology) to discuss Intimate Relationships during medical training. How can Health Professional Learners nurture their existing relationships amidst their already-hectic schedules?

## Apps



[Raft: Couple & Family Calendar](#)

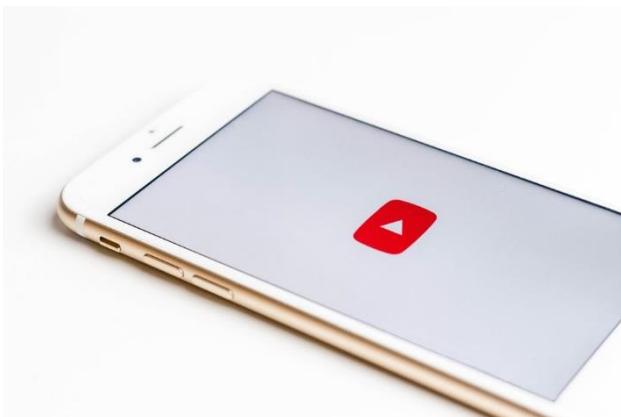
[Couple Game: Relationship Quiz](#)

[Kindu \(Sex Life App\)](#)

[Love Nudge for Couples](#)

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## Videos



[A Queer Vision of Love and Marriage](#)

Love is a tool for revolutionary change and a path toward inclusivity and understanding for the LGBTQ+ community. Married activists Tiq and Kim Katrin Milan have imagined their marriage -- as a transgender man and cis woman -- a model of possibility for people of every kind.



## [Relationships Are Hard, But Why?](#)

Relationships are hard. But what if it's not you or them or sex, money or even who picks up the socks. What if there is a far more primitive reason? In this talk, relationship expert Stan Tatkin explores why we fight from the perspective of neuroscience – and how to give your relationship a fighting chance.

## [4 Habits of ALL Successful Relationships](#)

ALL relationships face a similar set of hurdles. We all need to be equipped to get over the hurdles, so that our relationships don't just survive, but thrive. Based on over 20+ years' experience of working with countless couples, Dr. Andrea & Jon Taylor-Cummings share their observations of the 4 fundamental habits that all successful relationships exhibit.

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## Websites



### [Advice for Residents in a Relationship or Seeking One](#)

This article by Dr. Plotzker provides practical strategies for navigating relationships during residency, as well as for those who are seeking a relationship during residency training.

### [Love and learn: How to be a Good Partner during Medical Residency](#)

This article offers a list of “love hacks” to cultivating

a relationship while in residency.

### [Long-distance relationships and emergency medicine residency](#)

This article by Dr. Todd Guldner addresses the advantages and challenges of long-distance relationships. He also offers recommendations for communication, coping with separation, and maintaining intimacy.

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## Books

\*Please note that the following books can be borrowed from our [Wellness Library](#)

1. Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love. Sue Johnson

2. The Medical Marriage: Sustaining Healthy Relationships for Physicians and their Families. Wayne M. Sotile & Mary O. Sotile
3. Love Sense: The Revolutionary New Science of Romantic Relationships. Sue Johnson

## THE WELL OFFICE SERVICES

### PERSONAL WELLNESS SUPPORT



#### One-on-one counselling

Our Wellness Consultants [Dr. Martha Chamodraka](#) and [Camila Velez](#) provide one-on-one counselling appointments in a safe and confidential space to support residents in resolving personal issues that may be interfering with their wellness and learning.



#### Doc-to-doc

Need someone to talk to? Going through a rough patch or want to hear the experiences of other residents on issues like work-life and work-research balance, or adapting to a new university or a new culture?

[Doc-to-Doc](#) is a fully confidential peer support network for McGill residents.

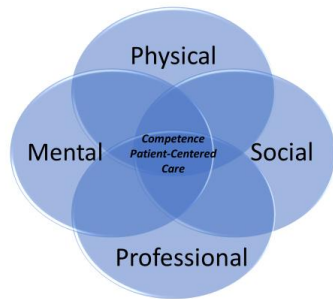


#### Wellness Library

The [Wellness Library](#) at The WELL Office is constantly expanding and includes books that pertain to wellness in the context of medicine. Currently, books can be borrowed by all Faculty of Medicine learners for one month.

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### GROUP WELLNESS SUPPORT



## Wellness Curriculum

[Workshops](#) are facilitated by Dr. Chamodraka and Camila Velez and are tailored to meet the unique needs of medical learners and address specific CanMEDS competencies. Workshops are offered upon request by residency programs and are given at the residency site during protected teaching time. Programs can request workshops by via our [PGME Session Request Form](#).



## Other Wellness Activities

[The WELL Office](#) collaborates with wellness professionals and is happy to organize upon request wellness activities for residents, including yoga, mindfulness, art therapy and pet therapy. We are also open to new ideas and suggestions!



## Ice cream Rounds

[Ice Cream Rounds](#) is a site-specific peer support group intended as a confidential forum for residents to discuss the unique challenges of residency.

To initiate ice cream rounds in your program, please submit a [PGME Session Request Form](#).

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Our next issue will be dedicated to the topic of **Forming Intimate Relationships during Residency**.

Please contact Lesley at [thewellofficeprojects@mcgill.ca](mailto:thewellofficeprojects@mcgill.ca) if you are a resident who is single and wish to share your experience, challenges, and advantages of being single during residency, as well as your unique perspective on it for our next issue's **Resident's Corner**. Your entry will be anonymous when published, if so you wish.

Feel free to also contact Lesley if you have any comments, suggestions or want to get involved with THRIVE.

Thank you for reading!