

Reflections:

I had never before felt frightened of going to work. Yet the fear of this unseen but deadly threat had left me uneasy and very uncomfortable. Every morning my drive into the hospital was fraught with anxiety and trepidation. Walking in the front door, I could feel my heart pounding. I look around, as if I could see the “enemy” if I concentrated hard enough. I was feeling on edge, and seeing everyone—patients, colleagues, employees—as potentially dangerous to me (and those I care about). New routines; not touching anything until I clean it, regarding a keyboard with suspicion. With time, I settle into the new routine (or so I think). But in fact I am not settling in, or “getting used” to this new reality. I come to realize that I am not coping well. I am having trouble managing my emotions. I am feeling overwhelmed by all that is happening. Every where I turn I see the faces and hear the voices of those counting on me to help; I want to help, I feel guilty that I am not doing more, and at the same time I feel helpless. I want/need to keep helping others, but I feel I am falling apart. I want to run away..I am afraid I will break down. I have the support of my wife, but I no longer have faith in myself that I can deal with the situation. I am having trouble reconciling the idea that as a physician I must be strong and immune to the stresses of medical life the with reality of how I am actually feeling. So, for the first time in my life, I seek professional help. I attend a virtual group therapy session to find support and guidance. And slowly I begin to feel that I can face the challenges ahead of me. I receive support and understanding from colleagues. I also share my experiences and struggles with friends, colleagues and trainees, including the steps i took to address my emotional maelstrom. I share my sense of vulnerability, to help with my healing and hopefully give courage and reassurance to others. My hope is that by sharing these reflections I can give comfort to colleagues who may be experiencing similar feelings, and remind everyone that we all human beings, with strengths and vulnerabilities. Real courage is recognizing our vulnerabilities, and actively seeking the help and support we may need to help us through challenging moments in our lives.

Dr Ben Schiff

