

The importance of wellness, mentorship and collaboration

By Gregory Greco, DO
ASPS President

I understand that it might be cliché to talk about a season of renewal in the spring issue of *PSN*, but as we get further into 2023, I find myself reflecting on where we are both as an organization and a specialty. I know there is more we can do and achieve together, but the first step in any process of renewal typically begins within.

In February, Medscape released the latest edition of its annual "Lifestyle, Happiness and Burnout Report," which noted that of all specialties surveyed in 2022, plastic surgeons were "happiest." The report tallied 71 percent of plastic surgeons describing themselves as "happy" or "very happy" in their work. It's a nice takeaway given the tumult that the COVID-19 pandemic and the lingering effects of it wrought on the entire medical field – but we also know that the annual report is more of a snapshot than a full picture of the specialty. Even if it were a full picture, the fact that nearly one-third of plastic surgeons aren't happy in their work should be a reason for concern.

When the Wellness Task Force was created in 2018, ASPS leadership made a commitment to ensuring we would provide tools and a network for members who were struggling with feelings of stress and burnout – and the fact that the task force has since become a standing committee and that our toolkit has grown exponentially in the five years since reiterates the importance of wellness in our profession.

Concepts such as burnout and maintaining work/life balance mean different things to each of us, but we nevertheless must remain cognizant of the fact that we have careers that are subject to intense demands on our time, abilities and talents – and those demands can be compounded when taking part in



organizational and leadership roles. Due to the individual nature of maintaining a work/life balance and managing stress, I would hesitate to define or prescribe an answer. Nevertheless, I think it's important that we all take some time to stop and smell the roses when we can.

Our Wellness Committee last year launched "Project Well" to provide resources to ASPS members and their practices related to wellness and burnout. These resources, which include a series of modules relevant to plastic surgeons in all stages of their careers, can be found online at plasticsurgery.org. We are also taking our commitment to wellness to Plastic Surgery The Meeting 2023 in Austin, Texas, this year. Keep a watch out for our logo depicting Project Well-branded programming, events and healthy refreshment choices.

Mentorship

Another topic that has been at the forefront of my mind lately is that of mentorship – not only the debts we owe to those who helped us get to where we are today, but the important roles that each of us play in fostering the next generation of plastic surgeons.

In Greek mythology, Mentor was a friend of Odysseus entrusted with the education of Odysseus' son, Telemachus. Today, Merriam-Webster defines a mentor as a "trusted counselor or guide."

As my presidency approaches the six-month milestone, I have had the opportunity to meet, reconnect and reflect on so many professional relationships that have been formed throughout my career. There has been a lot of welcome introspection and conscious change around the mentor I would like to be – and I'm eternally grateful that so much of this has been modeled by the individuals that I rely on for moral support, guidance and, at times, someone who is simply willing to listen. As

plastics surgeons, we have all been consciously or unconsciously influenced by individuals through either a structured, assigned mentor/mentee relationship or, perhaps, a less-structured or amorphous relationship that still imparted a significant influence on us personally and professionally. These relationships remain embedded in our daily professional output.

That output represents those surgical maneuvers, patient management tips, academic involvement with medical students and residents, personal and professional relationships, etc. There are undoubtedly fragments of this imparted wisdom permeating everything that we do. Mentors, at times, never even realized that they were mentors. Sometimes, as busy professionals, we forget to thank others for the influence they had on shaping our professional careers. This year at Plastic Surgery The Meeting, we want to create an opportunity for our members to recognize their mentors. In the near future, you will receive an email from ASPS asking whether you would like to thank a mentor. Please complete the form. These messages of gratitude and thanks will be displayed throughout the convention center.

Furthering opportunity

A major goal of my presidency is to truly impart to all ASPS members just how much this Society truly represents you. When it comes to topics such as research and innovation, I know that it's easy to look at the academic institutions tied to recent breakthroughs and feel that those of us in private practice seem to exist in our own little plastic surgery desert.

The fact of the matter, however, is that in breaking down our Society's membership, nearly half of our members are private, solo or group practice. It's a fallacy to think that progress made either as an organization or a specialty is done by only half of its membership – and it's simply wrong to think that opportunities aren't there for members who aren't tied to academic

institutions. Yes, there are differences in the resources (and megaphones) through which we can tell the world who we are, but there is no doubt that our members in private practice are huge sources of untapped data, surgical and technical innovation that often unfairly go unnoticed due to practice demands and lack of bandwidth by our members.

As a solo private practitioner for more than two decades, I was fortunate to have a major teaching hospital within a few miles of my practice that afforded the unique opportunity to work beside medical students and general surgery residents. In fact, this opportunity led to me eventually becoming the medical student clerkship director and then general surgery program director. Even through this connection that proved to be an influential and rewarding part of my career, I still felt isolated as a plastic surgeon – swimming in a sea of general surgery. At times, I would have welcomed the possibility of prospectively presenting a difficult reconstruction or cosmetic scenario to an audience of my peers.

One of my presidential goals this year is to create an opportunity network to harness and highlight our Society's private practitioners and facilitate collaborations with our academic institutions and surgeons. I hope to advance my proposed initiative, the PAIRE Program: Private/Academic Initiative for Research and Education, in the near future. Whether working with medical students and/or residents or pairing plastic surgeons with residency programs, interesting case presentations, participating in journal clubs, or fostering and cultivating ideas that tap into the educational pipeline, I know that we can do more and go further when we work together.

I am looking forward to seeing all of you in Austin for Plastic Surgery The Meeting 2023. Plans are well underway for another annual meeting stacked with amazing educational programming in one of the United States' most welcoming host cities. Please be sure to join us. **PSN**

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Thoughts on retirement, legacy and what to do after plastic surgery

By Richard Baynosa, MD
PSN Associate Medical Editor

In my past few columns for *PSN*, I focused on issues ranging from wellness and burnout to the deeply complex issue of child-care, particularly in dual-physician families. These are undoubtedly important issues that require multifaceted approaches to simply begin tackling the problems posed. There are many aspects of wellness and burnout over which we have little control, and I know how that can sometimes make one feel powerless.

Nevertheless, the optimistic, glass-half-full part of me began to search for areas where I can exert some amount of control, and I soon came to realize that too often, we focus on what's missing in the present without seriously considering what we should be doing to prepare for the future. The future is never guaranteed, but I do believe that we need to invest some time and energy into thinking about what we would like our lives to look like in the future – particularly our lives after practicing plastic surgery. I read an editorial in the *Archives of Plastic Surgery* last December written by one of the giants of our field, The PSF past President Peter Neligan, MD. His commentary included



several pearls from his own retirement in January 2021.

I encourage you all to read his editorial, but here are some of the highlights that I believe are most pertinent to folks that haven't seriously thought about retirement or planning for a future after plastic surgery:

- It's better to be asked why you retired rather than being asked when you are going to retire.
- High achievers, as most plastic surgeons are, frequently are reluctant to retire owing to the fear of losing one's identity.
- It's important to retire to something, not from something.
- It's a sad fact that there are very few of us, if any, who are irreplaceable.
- While you may need plastic surgery in your life, it will continue to advance without you.

Many of us are reluctant to even think about retirement. However, I would encourage those of you who haven't begun planning to consider the fact that it's one of the few areas in our career in which we can really seize control. Life after our careers in plastic surgery will undoubtedly affect our wellness in the future and potentially provide a long-term solution for

those whose burnout cannot be resolved. Determining in advance what our priorities will be when we no longer can – or want to be – in the O.R. will relieve the potential anxiety as we get closer to the end of our careers.

Do we want to make sure we can check-off all our bucket list items? Do we need to make sure our children and their offspring are comfortable in perpetuity? Do we want to travel the globe or play golf in our own backyard until we're no longer able to do so? Do we want to make sure that the legacy that we built during our careers endures in perpetuity? Each of these pursuits requires not only adequate financial planning, but also the forethought to decide what it is we want to do with the rest of our lives after plastic surgery.

Legacy, by definition, is something that's passed on and endures. Many of us see this as our family, the lives of our patients for whom we have cared, the residents and students that we have trained and taught, the endowments that we have funded to help others, the practitioners that we have helped to influence through our lectures, journal articles, book chapters, videos and textbooks. It can also be traced to the roles in leadership, academia or administration in which we've helped steer organizations and institutions. Nevertheless, the whole of our legacy doesn't need to be defined solely by our working careers. As Dr. Neligan explains, we can have just as much impact on

others and ourselves after we have hung up our scrubs and put away our scalpels. The key to doing this, however, begins with planning.

No matter where you are in your career, if you haven't thought about retirement, I would implore you to consider setting aside time to either begin or continue thinking about this important aspect of your future after plastic surgery and how it will impact your well-being. Start asking questions about your pension and your retirement savings with your financial planner. How much money will you need to enjoy your years after plastic surgery the way that you would like? How close are you to achieving that goal? What would you like to do after your career in plastic surgery ends? Do you have enough interests to keep yourself busy when your days and nights no longer include seeing patients, operating, and the business and administration of plastic surgery?

The future always draws nearer. Without a doubt, the biggest mistake we all make is thinking that we have enough time to push any array of tasks to the backburner – particularly the unnerving prospect of retirement planning, let alone taking up some hobby to fill future time. As the quote by Harvey Mackay goes, time is free but it's priceless. You can't own it, but you can use it. You can't keep it, but you can spend it. And once it's lost, you can never get it back. The time to begin thinking about retirement and your legacy after plastic surgery is now. **PSN**