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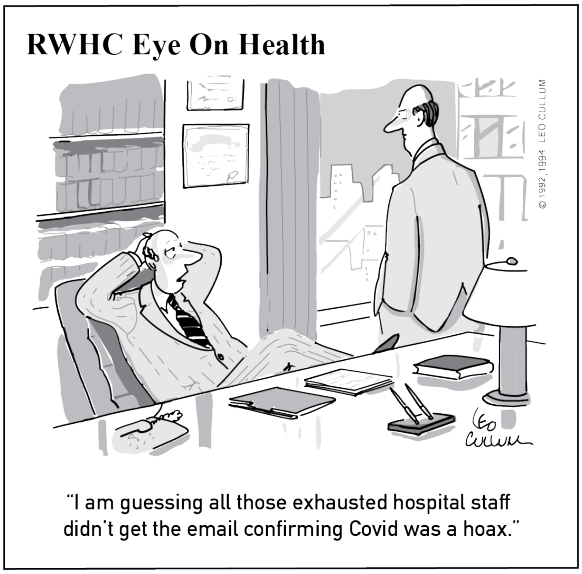
Eye On Health

Review & Commentary on Health Policy Issues for a Rural Perspective – November 1, 2021

Letters to the Nurse Struggling Right Now…

Intro from Erin Smital, Nursing Professional Development Educator and Nurse Residency Coordinator:

I want to take a moment and share an incredible experience I have recently been a part of here at RWHC. We offer a Nurse Residency Program that is designed for the new graduate nurse. It is structured around monthly learning sessions, with a focus on providing an interactive, reflective and enriched learning environment. The program is designed to enhance recruitment/retention of the new graduate nurse and support their transition into a competent practitioner. I am proud to announce that we recently completed year 17 of this program and in doing so asked that our participants write an open letter to "The nurse struggling right now…".



The original intention of these letters was to share them with the year 18 participants. After speaking with the participants and reviewing the letters, I realized that these kind words of support and encouragement are meant for a larger audience…they are meant for every nurse, in every position, in every stage of their career.

To the Nurse Struggling Right Now… "Welcome to the crazy world of nursing. You joined at a time that was not ideal. It probably isn't what you imagined it'd be. You walked onto the floor of your first shift greeted with N95s and gowns – not smiles and hugs. You have probably questioned many times by now what exactly you're doing. What exact role you have. If this is the way it will always be. I want you to know that you're valued by someone out there. It may not be your boss or your co-workers. However, there is someone. It may have been a past patient that you spent that extra 5 minutes with. It may be the family member you called with an update. It may even be the pharmacy tech who ran up a med for you and you were the only one who told them 'thank you' that day. Do not base your value on how many people openly tell you they appreciate. I just need you to believe you are valued, appreciated, and loved even when no one says it. This profession needs you. These patients need you. Take your time to cry about the shift you had. Let yourself feel the emotions. The next day I need you to show up with a fresh outlook on a new day. Don't be afraid to talk to your peers because I PROMISE we've been there, too. You don't always have to have a good day. But I need you to have some sort of a day. Please keep your head up. Please reach out. Please keep touching lives."

Signed: "A fellow struggling nurse."

To the Nurse Struggling Right Now… "You. Are. Not. Alone. Remember who you are, and how far you've come. Sleepless nights, constant studying, passing your NCLEX, performing your first IV and getting it the first try. Little victories are BIG victories.

Whether it's performing CPR or giving a patient's family member a hug – you are helping. You ARE making a difference. This is your calling. Keep putting one step forward. There will be days when you're stuck in the fog, and days when a rainbow appears. Remember – whether you feel like you don't know what you're doing, the patient only sees your help. I promise you, it will get better. But until then, find your person. Who do you look up to as a nurse? Who is supportive and willing to help when you need it? Lean on them! Because they were in your shoes once. Give yourself a hug. Go pet a baby goat. Do whatever refills your cup. You're doing an amazing job!!"



30th Annual $2,500 Monato Essay Prize
Best Rural Health Paper by a
University of Wisconsin Student
or recent graduate. Submit by June 1st.
www.rwhc.com/Awards.aspx

To the Nurse Struggling Right Now… "Remember why you became a nurse! Times are tough with COVID, but hopefully one day it will pass. You are making a difference in people's lives! You are leaving a positive impact on your patients. You matter! The work you do matters! If you are unhappy with the area that you are in now, go out there and go for your dream job! You know more than you think you know. Be confident! I have been struggling lately myself, but I realized what is causing those struggles, and I have chosen to address them. You can do the same! ☺"

"We are in this together!"

Eye On Health is the monthly newsletter of the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative. Begun in 1979, RWHC has as its **Mission** that rural Wisconsin communities will be the healthiest in America. Our **Vision** is that... RWHC is a strong and innovative cooperative of diversified rural hospitals... it is the "rural advocate of choice" for its Members... it develops and manages a variety of products and services... it assists Members to offer high quality, cost-effective healthcare… assists Members in partnerships to make their communities healthier… generates additional revenue by services to non-Members… ongoing use of strategic alliances in pursuit of its Vision. Tim Size <**timsize@rwhc.com**>, Editor, 880 Independence Lane, Sauk City, WI 53583

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To the Nurse Struggling Right Now… "It may not seem like it right now, but it will get better, things will get easier, you may have shifts that leave you in tears, but they will make you a better nurse. What you are doing matters. It may not feel like you are being appreciated for all your work but you are helping someone. What you do is affecting someone and they see it. They appreciate you. Remember why you wanted to become a nurse, and tell yourself that on those hard days. Not every day will be hard and you will care for people that you will never forget. It is worth it. I have been where you are, felt how you feel. We all feel like this sometimes but you have worked too hard for this. Believe in yourself. Trust that great things are in store for you, you just need to hang in there. Reach out to family or friends when you need the help. Find ways to refill your cup because you need to take care of yourself, too. I believe in you. You will do great things."

To the Nurse Struggling Right Now… "Remember how you got here and never forget your why. All the sleepless nights, tears shed, extra hours spent studying – all for what reason? So you could be where you are right now. Becoming a nurse was the hardest and most rewarding task I've done. Seeing babies be born to people becoming parents has reminded me every day of my why. The relationships I've built, the growth I've experienced over a year is something that I couldn't see at one point and here I am. Know that it is ok to cry. It is ok to not know something; you cannot be liked by every person in the world but you can sure treat people how you want to be treated. 'You teach people how to treat you' is so true. Be confident, ask questions, ask yourself what is your why, remember you're making a difference in people's lives. If you don't think you're being treated right say something. It's ok to write out your report to pass to the next nurse – helps me stay organized. Remember Doctors are human beings like us, not gods even though some may act it. Ask questions often. Talk about work to someone who cares/listens. Stick up for yourself. It's ok to switch preceptors if it's not working."

MAJOR UW LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITY

The University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute is looking for an individual to lead one of their key program areas, Mobilizing Action Toward Community Health (MATCH), to help build innovative and evidence informed practices to advance health and equity. Closes Nov 7.
https://bit.ly/3iAXQWP

To the Nurse Struggling Right Now… "I know you're struggling right now. You may not even know why. But please know that you are strong, smart, brave, caring and knowledgeable. You are all these things and more. Remind yourself why you wanted to be a nurse. Reflect on all you've learned up to this point. Remember that this day will end and there is a tomorrow. Remember mistakes are only lessons we all learn from. We are all human and we've all made them. Remember the patient who thanked you for being kind to them. You can always ask questions–and make sure you do because you will never know everything to know in this world. Stay positive and confident because you're amazing and if you forget that tell yourself 'I'm amazing.' Follow it with all the good you did today. Life is all about choices–you choose the kind of day you have, your attitude, your tone, etc… Make the choice to make a difference in someone else's life today. Be a footprint. They'll never forget you. 'People forget what words are used, but they never forget how you made them feel'."

To the Nurse Struggling Right Now… "Every day is a new day, a new fight, a new chance to be that positive impact on someone's life, who without you, may not be here anymore, may be scared, alone, or depressed. There will be a day that a patient, resident, or family member will remember how you cared for them or their loved one, and tell you how much your care impacted their lives when they needed you most."

"Also, remember to care for yourself. Hobbies, family, friends or volunteering somewhere can help 'refill your cup.' Remember why you decided nursing in the first place, who inspired you. What you do matters, you matter, your health matters."

"We all only have one life and your passion and commitment will be remembered by hundreds if not thousands of people."

To the Nurse Struggling Right Now… "You are so much stronger than you know. You have made it to this point for a reason. You are meant to touch the lives of so many individuals that you have yet to meet. Through life, everyone has a journey that looks different, we all have our ups and downs, our triumphs and challenges. What I can promise you is that those challenges will set you apart and allow you to become an even better nurse. Remember during those challenging times that there will be a time when the challenge is not so challenging anymore. That will be your time to realize that your challenge has become a triumph."

"During my struggle as a new nurse, I always kept one specific phrase in the back of my head: 'Do not run away from the things that scare you. Run toward them, then one day, they will not be so scary anymore.' These experiences that we perceive as scary or challenging allow us to grow. Remember not to run away, but keep fighting for what you have worked so hard for. Just be sure to take care of yourself along the way. Keep doing the things that make you happy, and step away from those that do not make you feel joy."

"Please always know that you are not alone in your struggle."

To the Nurse Struggling Right Now… "I know that this journey has been so long and hard to get to where you are now. But in this moment I want you to know that it is worth it. At some point in your life you were wishing to be in the place that you are at right now. We get so caught up in what is happening in the world that we forget to stop and look back at where we came from. You have made it through so much and that should be celebrated. Please don't ever forget where your passion started; why did you become a nurse? The answer to that question will continue to drive you through this difficult time. Nursing is not for everyone. It is hard. Don't be afraid to follow your dreams even if it means taking a leap of faith. Find a work friend, someone who you can trust and relate with. They will help you through. These friends are so important to have. Follow you heart and dream big. You can do it!"

To the Nurse Struggling Right Now… "You are enough. You make a difference in lives every day.

People need you, they depend on you. Their life is in your hands. Your smile can change their day. Your kindness may be just enough to keep them going. I know that you're tired but you can't give up. You make a difference. We are all frustrated, but together we will get through these tough times. There are brighter days ahead. The world needs you. You make a difference every day whether you know it or not. You are the one to comfort someone on their last days. You bring new lives into this world. You save lives of those who don't think they will make it. Being a nurse is the best title you will earn."

While the above was written by nurses to nurses, they are wise words for all of us working in healthcare.

Hurricane Ida, COVID & Resilience

From "A lesson from Hurricane Ida that is changing the world" by Marshall Ingwerson, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 9/16/21:

"In the weeks since Hurricane Ida landed at New Orleans, it has illustrated two very different stories. One is the rising violence of the changing climate. The other, which is only now fully emerging, is the human resilience that has already made the world far safer."

"As part of the Monitor's Finding Resilience project, here is a tale of two cities: The New Orleans hit by Hurricane Katrina 16 years ago and the New Orleans hit by Hurricane Ida late last month."

"They were not identical storms. Ida struck with less sweeping girth than Katrina but more sheer force. They weren't all that different either."

"But they hit a different New Orleans. Katrina killed more than 1,800 people. The breaching of the levees put 80% of the city underwater. The blow was nearly existential to New Orleans as we knew it. Three in ten residents vacated, many permanently."

"After Ida struck last month, the now-fortified levees held against the surge. The toll in fatalities in Louisiana is at 28. A similar number died in New Jersey as Ida-driven rain flooded the Northeast. The scale of damage and heartbreak is so vastly different that clearly Louisiana is more robust and storm-hardy than in 2005. The population had even grown back in New Orleans, recently surpassing its pre-Katrina numbers."

"The effects of human resilience"

"Ida has been covered as an example and a warning of the rising violence of climate change, making hurricanes stronger, floods higher, and fires bigger and more frequent in the dry West. And that's an important context. But here's another: Even as climate events become more dangerously frequent and potent, humanity has actually become safer–dramatically safer."

"The economist Bjorn Lomborg finds that the number of people killed worldwide by climate-related events in the 1920s, a century ago, was 27 times higher than the number killed over the decade ending 2019. Corrected for the far higher global population today, the death rate a century ago was more than 130 times what it is today."

"Dr. Lomborg's point is that when we assess the costs, the dangers, and the difficulties that climate change implies, human resilience and ingenuity is a nontrivial factor. So far, in fact, it has been an overwhelming factor."

"A term like resilience can risk sounding a little minimizing and reductive–just a personal character trait. It is much more than that."

"Those who have been through a hurricane strike report that it is after the winds have gone quiet, the ground dried, and the sun shining in steamy afternoons, only then have they arrived at the hard part–the exhausting building back, the forging ahead, the relaunch into forward motion."

"So resilience is a matter of spirit, of finding the heart to come back. But its structure, the ladder resilience climbs, is learning. We pick ourselves up, we learn what we need to learn, and we get to work."

Aiming bigger–"And it's not just person-by-person resilience that drives the kind of change we have seen. It's collective. Only big, complex teams can

achieve what New Orleans accomplished in the past 16 years. The scale of the investment, the engineering, the overlapping interests, the cross-cutting visions and values–only politics can put all that together and sort all that out."

"That's counterintuitive in a time where politics is scorned as a divisive and inflammatory form of cultural theater, a little like professional wrestling but not as harmless."

"Yet humankind has made the world, per Mr. Lomborg's numbers, more than 99% safer against natural disasters in the last century by scaling resilience. And we do that through the institutions that work together."

"The only way we can learn and then act on as massive a scale as demanded of New Orleans is through the institutions we've developed over centuries–whether it's a city council, a police department, a university, an engineering association, a religious denomination, a news organization, a Supreme Court, or an updated building code."

"It's the lack of robust institutions that reduce resilience in a country like Haiti–where such institutions were undermined by Western powers for centuries–to a more individual matter. Anyone who has visited the nation has witnessed the sheer energy and unoppressed vitality of the people that crowd the streets of Port au Prince. The spirit is there, but it's a resilience on foot, a personal challenge, and not yet a resilience that can collectively build safety from the next natural disaster."

"Individual learning can be a flashlight for families, communities, organizations, nations. But it is collective learning, what we achieve together, that holds real power. In fact, civilization itself could be defined as collective learning."

"**That makes the resilience shown by New Orleans more than just a story of individual grit, but of what we, even in this raucously, ridiculously divided country, can do together**."

Marshall Ingwerson is former editor of the Monitor.

COVID Killing Rural at Twice Rate Urban

From "Covid is Killing Rural Americans at Twice the Rate of Urbanites," *KHN*, 9/30:

"Rural Americans are dying of Covid at more than twice the rate of their urban counterparts–a divide that health experts say is likely to widen as access to medical care shrinks for a population that tends to be older, sicker, heavier, poorer and less vaccinated."

"While the initial surge of Covid-19 deaths skipped over much of rural America, where roughly 15% of Americans live, nonmetropolitan mortality rates quickly started to outpace those of metropolitan areas as the virus spread nationwide before vaccinations became available, according to data from the Rural Policy Research Institute."

"Since the pandemic began, about 1 in 434 rural Americans have died of Covid, compared with roughly 1 in 513 urban Americans, the institute's data shows. And though vaccines have reduced overall Covid death rates since the winter peak, rural mortality rates are now more than double urban rates–and accelerating quickly."

"Part of the problem is that Covid incidence rates in September were roughly 54% higher in rural areas than elsewhere, said Fred Ullrich, a University of Iowa College of Public Health research analyst who co-authored the institute's report. He said the analysis compared the rates of nonmetropolitan, or rural, areas and metropolitan, or urban, areas. In 39 states, he added, rural counties had higher rates of Covid than their urban counterparts."

" 'There is a national disconnect between perception and reality when it comes to Covid in rural America,' said Alan Morgan, head of the National Rural Health Association. 'We've turned many rural communities into kill boxes. And there's no movement towards addressing what we're seeing in many of these communities, either among the public or among governing officials.' "

"Still, the high incidence of cases and low vaccination rates don't fully capture why mortality rates are so much higher in rural areas than elsewhere. Academics and officials alike describe rural Americans' greater rates of poor health and their limited options for medical care as a deadly combination. The pressures of the pandemic have compounded the problem by deepening staffing shortages at hospitals, creating a cycle of worsening access to care."

Climate, A Public Health Crisis: Making Connections & Building Solutions Together

Virtual: November 13

Climate change is a public health emergency. This unique conference focuses on the harmful health impacts of climate change, and provides tools for healthcare professionals, community members, and students to implement on an individual, department, organization, and community level.

In support of improving patient care, this activity has been planned and implemented by the UW–Madison Interprofessional Continuing Education Partnership (ICEP) and the Wisconsin Health Professionals for Climate Action.

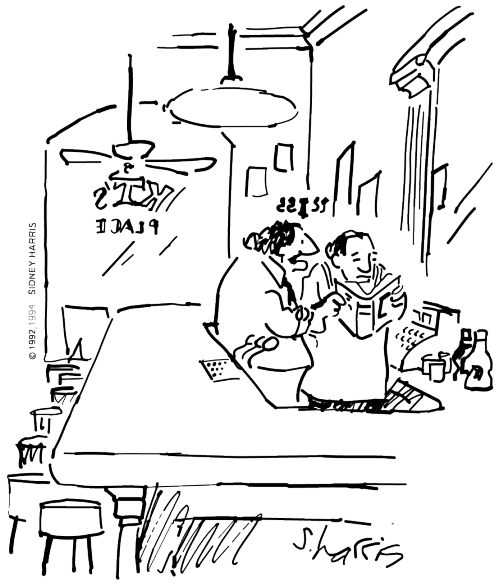
Registration and Continuing Education Info at:
https://bit.ly/3iIoPzG

"It's the latest example of the deadly coronavirus wreaking more havoc in some communities than others. Covid has also killed Native American, Black and Hispanic people at disproportionately high rates."

"Vaccinations are the most effective way to prevent Covid infections from turning deadly. Roughly 41% of rural America was vaccinated as of Sept. 23, compared with about 53% of urban America, according to an analysis by *The Daily Yonder*, a newsroom covering rural America. Limited supplies and low access made shots hard to get in the far-flung regions at first, but officials and academics now blame vaccine hesitancy, misinformation and politics for the low vaccination rates."

"Additionally, the overload of Covid patients in hospitals has undermined a basic tenet of rural health care infrastructure: the capability to transfer patients out of rural hospitals to higher levels of specialty care at regional or urban health centers."

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"The unvaccinated can run from COVID but not hide."

"Morgan said he can't count how many people have talked to him about the transfer problem."

" 'It's crazy, just crazy. It's unacceptable,' Morgan said. 'From what I'm seeing, that mortality gap is accelerating.' "

"Pre-pandemic, rural Americans had 20% higher overall death rates than those who live in urban areas, due to their lower rates of insurance, higher rates of poverty and more limited access to health care, according to 2019 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics."

"The nursing shortage hitting the country is particularly dire in rural areas, which have less money than large hospitals to pay the exorbitant fees travel nursing agencies are demanding. And as nursing temp agencies offer hospital staffers more cash to join their teams, many rural nurses are jumping ship."

"And then there's the burnout of working over a year and a half through the pandemic. Audrey Snyder, the immediate past president of the Rural Nurse Organization, said she's lost count of how many nurses have told her they're quitting. Those resignations feed into a relentless cycle: As travel nurse companies attract more nurses, the nurses left behind shouldering their work become more burned out–and eventually quit. While this is true at hospitals of all types, the effects in hard-to-staff rural hospitals can be especially dire."

"Rural health fears the staffing shortages could be exacerbated

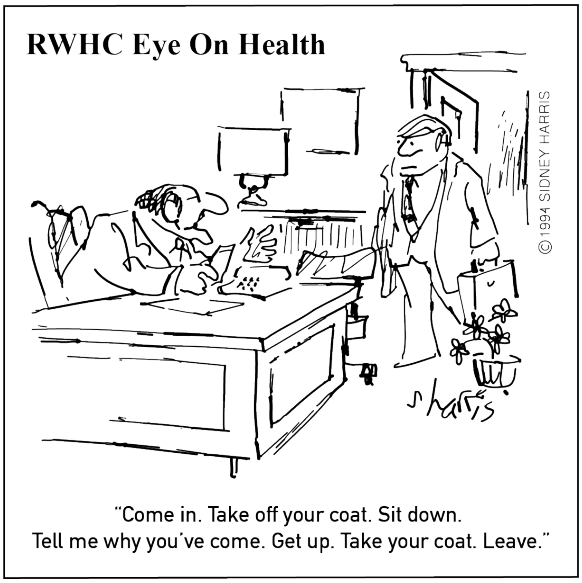
by vaccination mandates promised by President Joe Biden, which they say could cause a wave of resignations the hospitals cannot afford."

Leadership Insights: "Energy +/-"

The *Leadership Insights* series is by Jo Anne Preston, RWHC Workforce & Organizational Development Senior Manager. Back issues at **www.RWHC.com**.

This claim is one of a tiny number of things I am fairly certain about: **most people underestimate their impact on others, you and me included**. For a variety of reasons, most of us go around assuming that what we do on a day-to-day basis is not that noticed by others. It can be especially disconcerting to adapt to the increased visibility that comes with a higher level leadership title.

Being a leader does not take away your right to be yourself; to the contrary. Authenticity is critical to engaging employees. But **have you thought about what responsibility you have for how your authentic self adds to or drains the energy from others** as you go about your daily interactions?



The DRAIN. You might believe, "It's their problem if people don't like how I am," or, "People need to look out for themselves; it's not up to me to make their day," and you would not be wrong. But you might not be entirely right either. We do need to stop taking others' behaviors personally, but as leaders we own our part in creating a culture. Some actions can send your team's precious energy down the drain:

Rarely saying hello or smiling at work. People will tell themselves that it doesn't matter that you are like that, it's just "you." But they leak a little of their energy from every interaction with you, and who has excess energy to waste these days?

The deadpan response. People may understand that you are introverted. They may tell themselves that you are excited on the inside (they hope). But their inner dialogue fights the feeling that you are annoyed with them, burned out, don't like their ideas, don't like them, etc., and many will be left feeling tired from the mental and emotional sorting.

The oblivious dichotomy. This might be the leader with the shiny new sports car in the lot days after frontline staff layoffs, or talking about a major vacation when employees can't take a day off during a pandemic. I'm NOT saying that leaders should not get a new car or go on vacation. What I am saying is that leaders need to be aware that these things will be noticed and thought about. Most employees will consider it and understand it is absolutely your right to drive any car you want to, and that you totally deserve a vacation. But when they are worried for their livelihood during uncertain times, realistic or not, just realize that some of their energy will be used up in processing this.

Allowing disengaged behaviors in others. Those who sigh frequently, who don't attend meetings (or who do attend but don't participate), don't clean up their messes, interrupt others, etc., and are not coached to make improvements will take the life right out of a team.

The ADD. There are some easy ways to energize those around you with your actions:

Write a personal note. Want a motivational boost right now? *Read the letters the nurse residency grads wrote in this newsletter's lead article.* These powerful messages reach far beyond nurses to help the reader to keep showing up. Personal notes from you are a lasting fuel that can always be re-read on a difficult day.

Enter with intention. Before you enter any space (the hallway, the lunchroom, a meeting) ***decide*** that you want to add, not drain, energy to that space with your demeanor, facial expression–even under a mask

and words. This decision helps you remember that you make more of an impact than you realize. Just like with patient interactions that impact the patient experience, "every patient, every time," setting an intention with your team will keep your energy contributions in the plus column.

Admit to a rough day. This is where authenticity comes in. People don't expect you to be perfect, to not have struggles. Speaking up about it removes the need for people to lose their own energy trying to figure out what is going on with you and worrying it is about them. Your openness engages empathy and that motivates people.

Ask for feedback. Let people know that you want to be an energy contributor, and ask, "What are some things you see me doing that make a positive impact on the energy of the work environment? What are some things I could do that would make it more positive?" If the word "energy" doesn't sit right with you, replace it with morale, culture, mood, or motivation.

You DO make an impact. Make it the one that you want it to be.

*Contact Jo Anne Preston for individual or group coaching at **jpreston@RWHC.com** or 608-644-3261. For info re the RWHC Leadership Series go to* **www.RWHC.com/Services.aspx** *or contact Carrie Ballweg at **cballweg@RWHC.com** or 608-643-2343.*

Upcoming RWHC Leadership Programs

10/28 & 29: **Preceptor Training Program** (2-day)

11/19: **Manage Stress Before It Manages You** (4-hour)*

12/1 & 8: **MindSET** (2-part)*

1/18 & 25 - **Conflict: Building Trust through Skillful Conversations** (2-part)*

*Virtual. Non-Members Welcome. Register & other events: **www.RWHC.com/Services.aspx**

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