



Laughter is perhaps the best pandemic medicine

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I was recently traveling back from visiting my son in California, taking a break from reviewing a *Pediatric Radiology* journal article and catching up on e-mail, when I decided to see what was available in the airplane TV/movie selections. Low and behold, I came across a childhood favorite: the television show M*A*S*H. The airline had five episodes I could watch, and as I was flooded with long-term memories, laughing at the same jokes I laughed at 45 years ago. Somewhere between inflight episodes two and three, I decided to write down a few thoughts about my memories, about laughing so hard it makes your side hurt, and my career as a pediatric radiologist. Especially these last few years during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. I hope these few words inspire you to laugh more, care more, love life more and feel a sense of wellness during another wave of pandemic stress and potential burnout.

We in pediatric radiology are all too familiar with the shortage of graduates from pediatric radiology fellowships and the stress of more and more clinical work. We work long hours, read more complex clinical cases than ever, and come in off-hours for call cases, all the while hiding behind N-95s and other hospital-supplied masks, limiting lunch to eating alone in our offices so that we do not expose others in the reading room or cafeteria. We gown and glove for COVID-19-positive patients, and perhaps get rapid testing after providing care, so we do not take increased risks with our families and friends. We barely recognize people we know unless we can tell a friendly face by just their eyes. Our voices are muffled, and our ears hurt from the ear loops on our masks. We worry about how all of this affects our mission of patient care, education and research. And how it affects our trainees and their ability to learn and perhaps choose a career in diagnostic radiology and especially pediatric radiology.

We read articles telling us to reach out to our students early and often, show them how much fun it is to be a pediatric radiologist, to show them joy [1] — but not the side-splitting, slapstick fun like Hawkeye, Trapper and B.J. had, just positive affirmations of why it is great to be a pediatric radiologist. But as I sat on that plane, laughing too loud for my cabinmates, I noticed something by episode three. Those lovable characters were using humor to not only survive a difficult situation, but to create a long-lasting bond among co-workers, all the while saving lives in a most heroic way. They say laughter is the best medicine. I say that should not just be for our patients.

Why not start the day with a funny quote on the reading room whiteboard? How about telling a funny story or anecdote to the medical students and residents about your experiences in Louisville at oral boards. Wear a funny costume for Halloween — or better yet, on a regular workday. Tell a corny joke from out of nowhere just to get a chuckle or two. Keep it G-rated and appropriate, but that kind of comedy is sometimes the best and most creative. There must be at least one “cut up” among the faculty who can get you to giggle on at least a few occasions. Paste a cartoon up on a bulletin board for all to see. May I suggest Garfield, The Far Side, or my personal favorite, Bloom County, to start.

The goal is to make one person laugh — and if it is a medical student or a resident, even better.

When we say, “show the trainees how much fun pediatric radiology can be,” it maybe should mean more than just interesting and satisfying. I think it should include a snort or belly laugh as well. If they see us laughing while working, that is even better advertising on why it is great to be a part of our specialty.

In the last episode on the flight, Hawkeye traded Colonel Blake’s antique desk for desperately needed hydrocortisone [2]. As one of the transport helicopters flew over the mountains with Henry’s desk hanging below, Hawkeye turned to the Colonel and asked if he was sending the desk out for refurbishing (in the middle of war-torn Korea). Pretty funny during the worst of all pandemics — war.

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So let's put down the journals and textbooks for a second and pick up a joke book. That is my prescription for burn-out, stress and perhaps the workforce shortage. Even if we are shorthanded for a while, at least we'll feel a little better about it!

And if you need any good dad jokes, my boys say I am one of the best (or worst, depending on how you look at it)!

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Declarations

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