

Perhaps the secret of living well is not in having all the answers but in pursuing unanswerable questions in good company. – Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen

A physician recently shared with me how the pressure to be perfect is practically paralyzing at times. It reminded me how this is a challenge our physicians and advanced practice professionals every day, specifically, being expected to have the perfect answer for every patient situation. I hear it from residents who are determined to be the smartest one in the room and APPs who work hard to know what is expected of them and how to share their knowledge. I also hear it from urgent care clinicians who must make quick decisions, and surgeons who think about the responsibility of holding a person's life in their hands.



Hearing about this challenge reminded me of a quote from the book, *When Breath Becomes Air*. The author, a neuro surgeon dying from lung cancer lost his friend, a past colleague from his residency, to suicide. He wrote:

"We had assumed an onerous yoke, that of mortal responsibility. Our patients' lives and identities may be in our hands, yet death always wins. Even if you are perfect, the world isn't. The secret is to know that the deck is stacked, that you will lose, that your hands or judgement will slip, and yet still struggle to win for your patients. You can't ever reach perfection, but you can ... ceaselessly strive toward it."

Making mistakes is human and learning from mistakes takes courage.

How will you react when you make a mistake, or use poor judgement that even surprises you?

If you need to be the smartest one in the room there will always be isolation and pain. When you learn that the smartest people are not always the ones with the answers, but the ones with good and thoughtful questions, life becomes a wonderful challenge full of discovery.

Perhaps reminding ourselves that we are human, and never perfect, may help us be gentler with ourselves and others. Maybe it will enable us to give and receive grace more frequently. As we strive for perfection perhaps we can learn from all imperfection. I know for me, it feels good to be surrounded

"You will not always be the smartest person in the room, and you will not always be the strongest or the funniest or the most talented. But you can always be brave and you can always be kind, and these are the things you should be every minute of every day for the rest of your life. Because yes, those other things, they're great things.
But these things are better."

by smart people who make it is safe to ask thought-provoking questions.

I hope that this month finds you thriving and embracing the most human parts of yourself with curiosity and respect.

Thank you for all that you do! - *Kathy*



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