

Seeing Kindness:
**Using Images of Caring to Foster
Compassion in Healthcare**
(and lower stress)

David Fryburg, MD

March 26, 2026
Schwartz Compassion in Action Webinar

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The Schwartz Compassion in Action Webinar Series is brought to you by:



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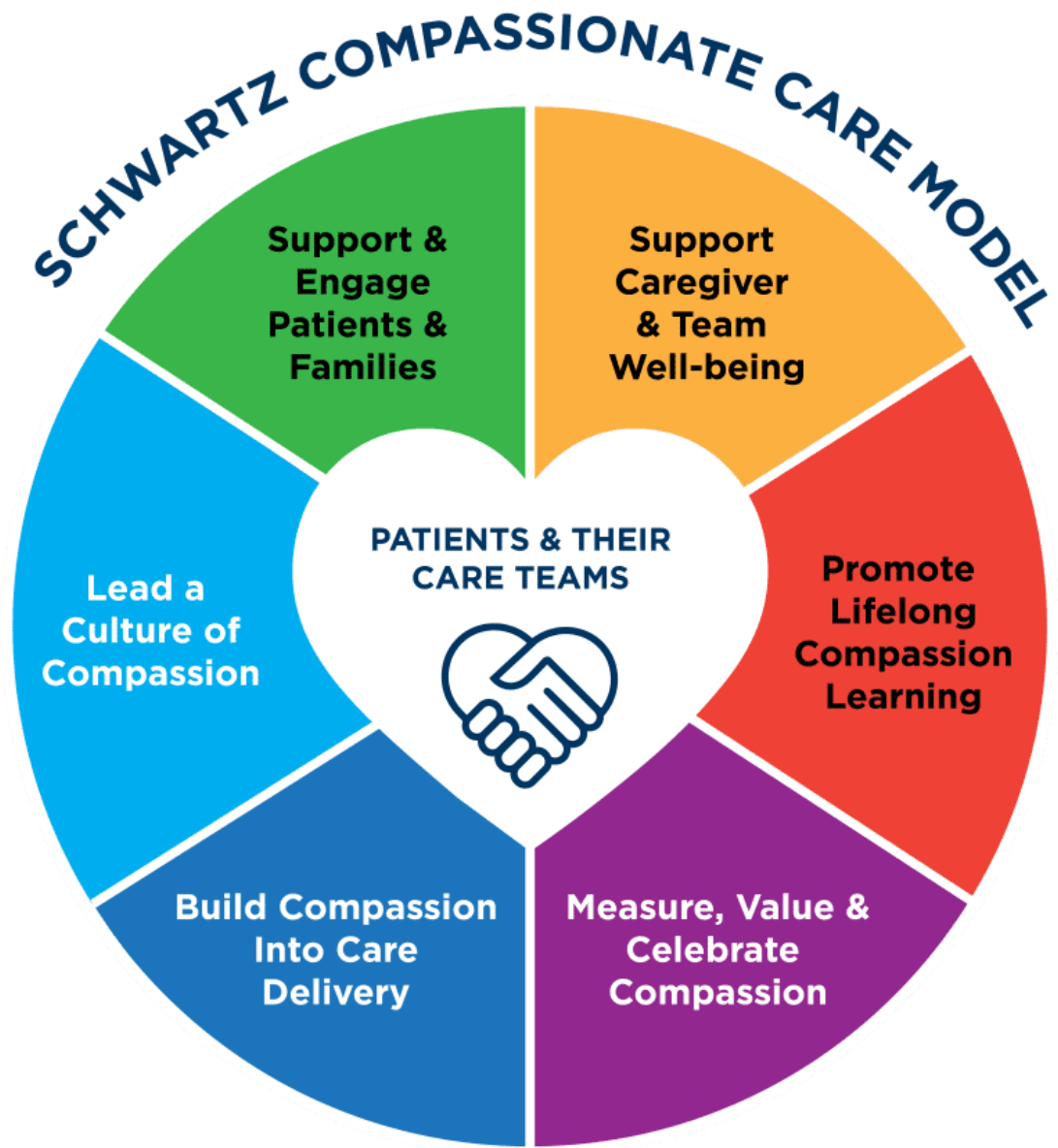
**Ellen Feldberg Gordon and Michael Gordon,
in memory of Julian and Eunice Cohen**



the schwartz center
FOR COMPASSIONATE HEALTHCARE

A Roadmap for Advancing Organization-wide Compassion

Learn more at:
theschwartzcenter.org/care-model



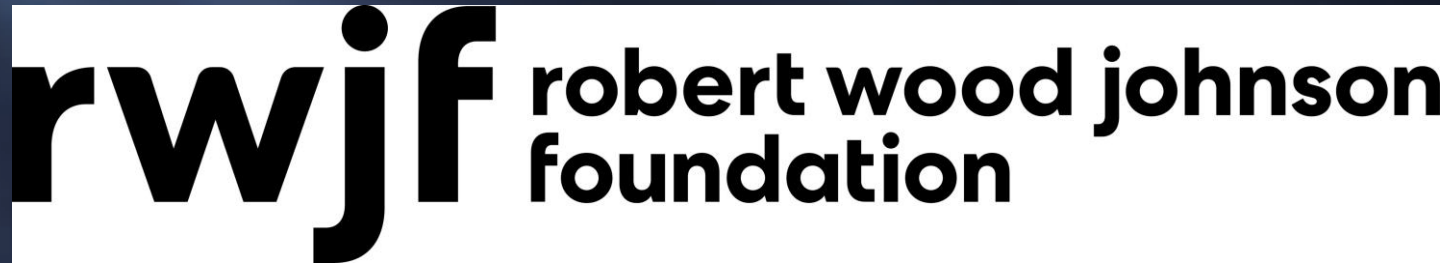
Disclosures

- Envision Kindness is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization with a mission to foster kindness and connection in healthcare at scale
 - In addition to grants and donations, EK is funded through licensing of kindness media
- DF is the President and Co-Founder of Envision Kindness



In Gratitude:

EK's research in this presentation has been supported in part by:



The opinions expressed in this seminar are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of either organization.

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Allied Concepts in Caring

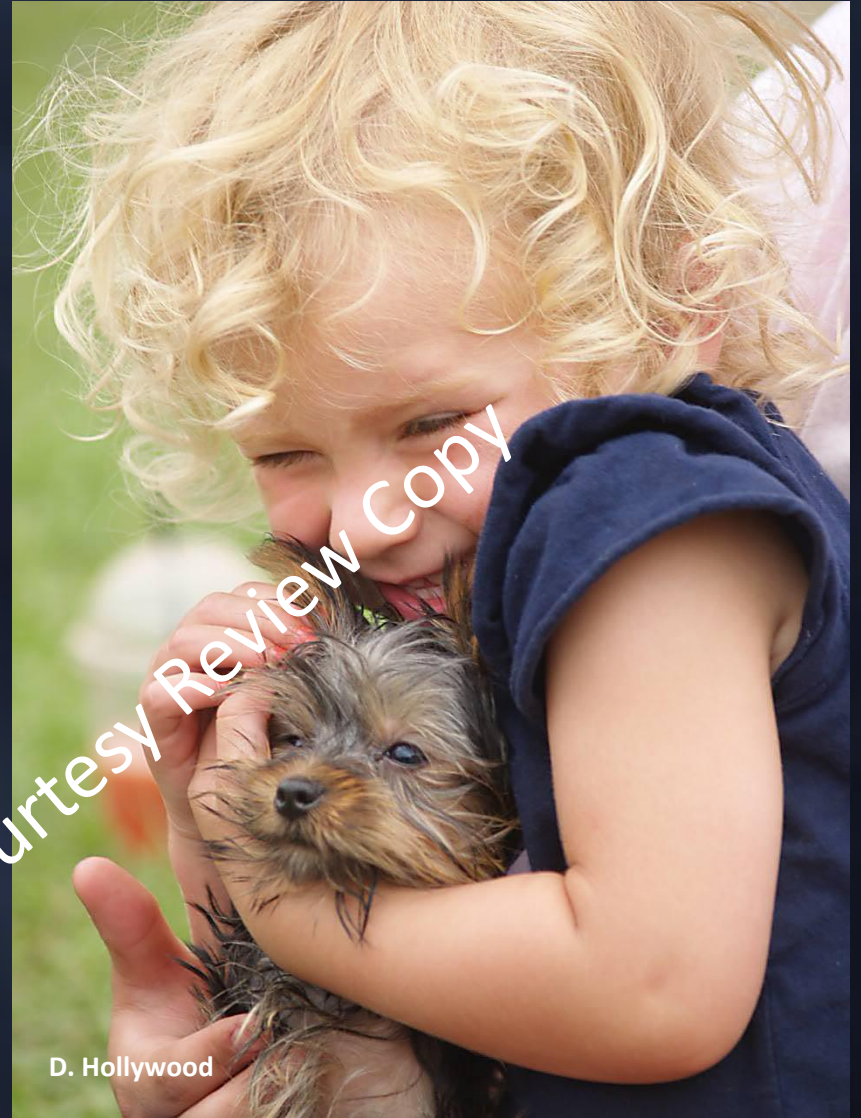


Altruism Compassion Empathy Forgiveness Gratitude Kindness Volunteerism

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**There are 4 main points
to today's talk**

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D. Hollywood

#1:

**There is a large cost of stress
in healthcare in both human
and economic terms.**

**Stress depletes energy for
empathy and compassion
and degrades the care
experience.**

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#2:
**Kindness and compassion
are the natural antidote to
stress and pathway to
better health.**

**They are much more than
“nice to have.”**

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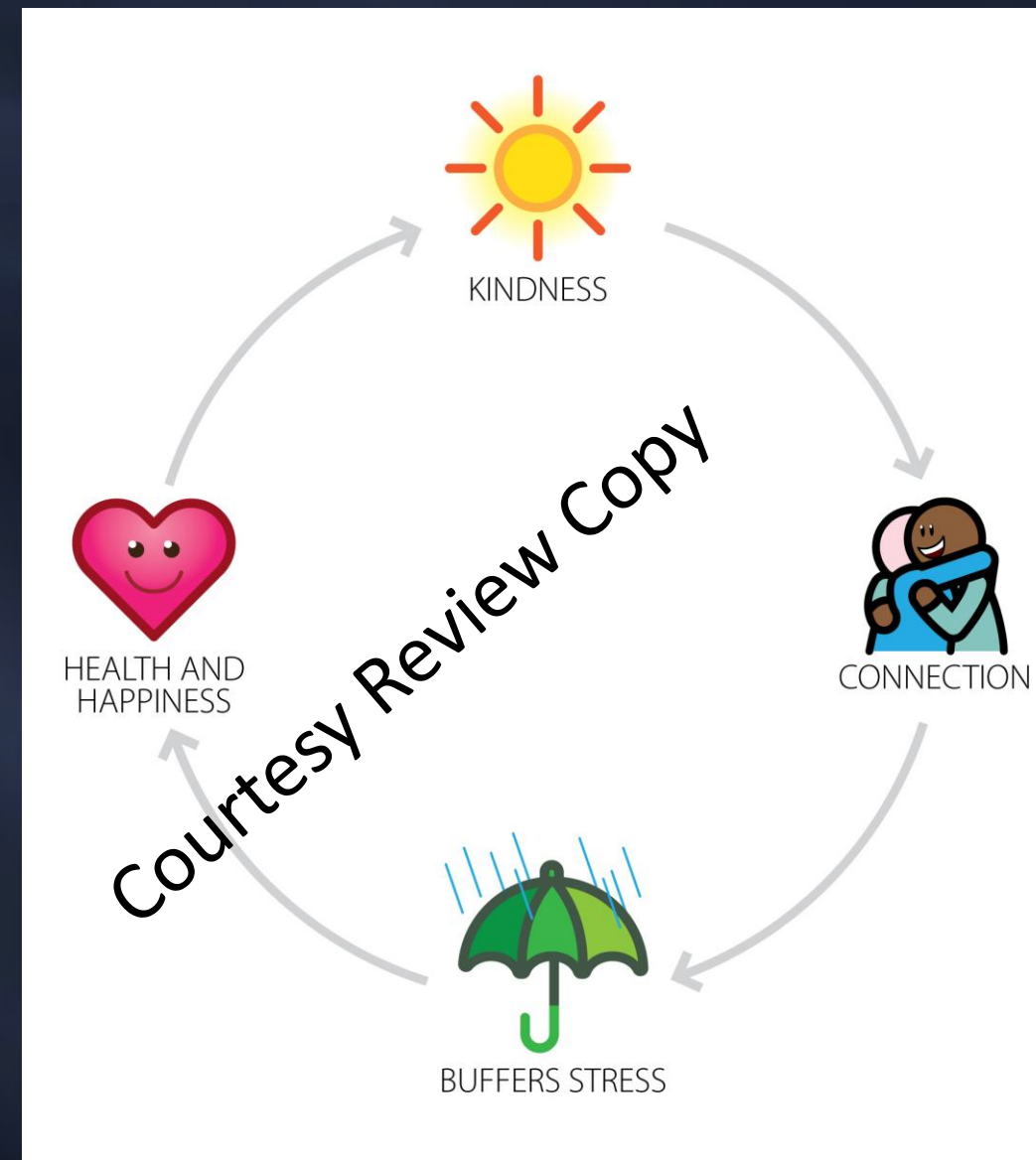
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A. Amolat

Connection mediates the effects of kindness, buffering stress and fostering resilience and well-being.



#3:

It is possible to foster kindness and compassion at scale for patients, clinicians, and staff.



#4:
**Seeing kindness and
connection rapidly activates
salutary neuropsychology to
elevate emotions and
behaviors and reduce stress.**



R. Cirakoglu

Why Does a Hug Feel So Good?

This video can be seen on our website:

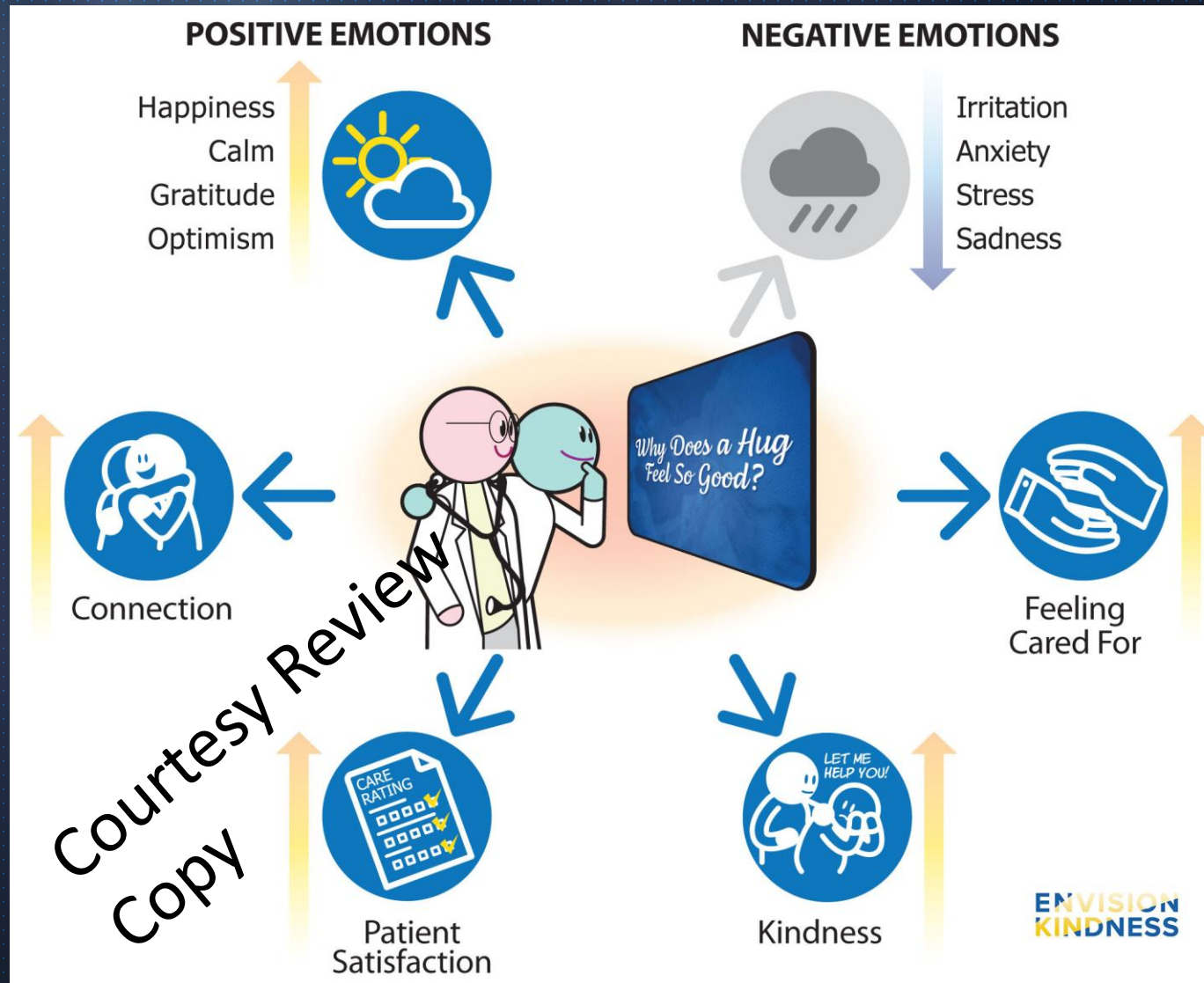
www.envisionkindness.org

How do you feel?

That is the neuropsychology at work

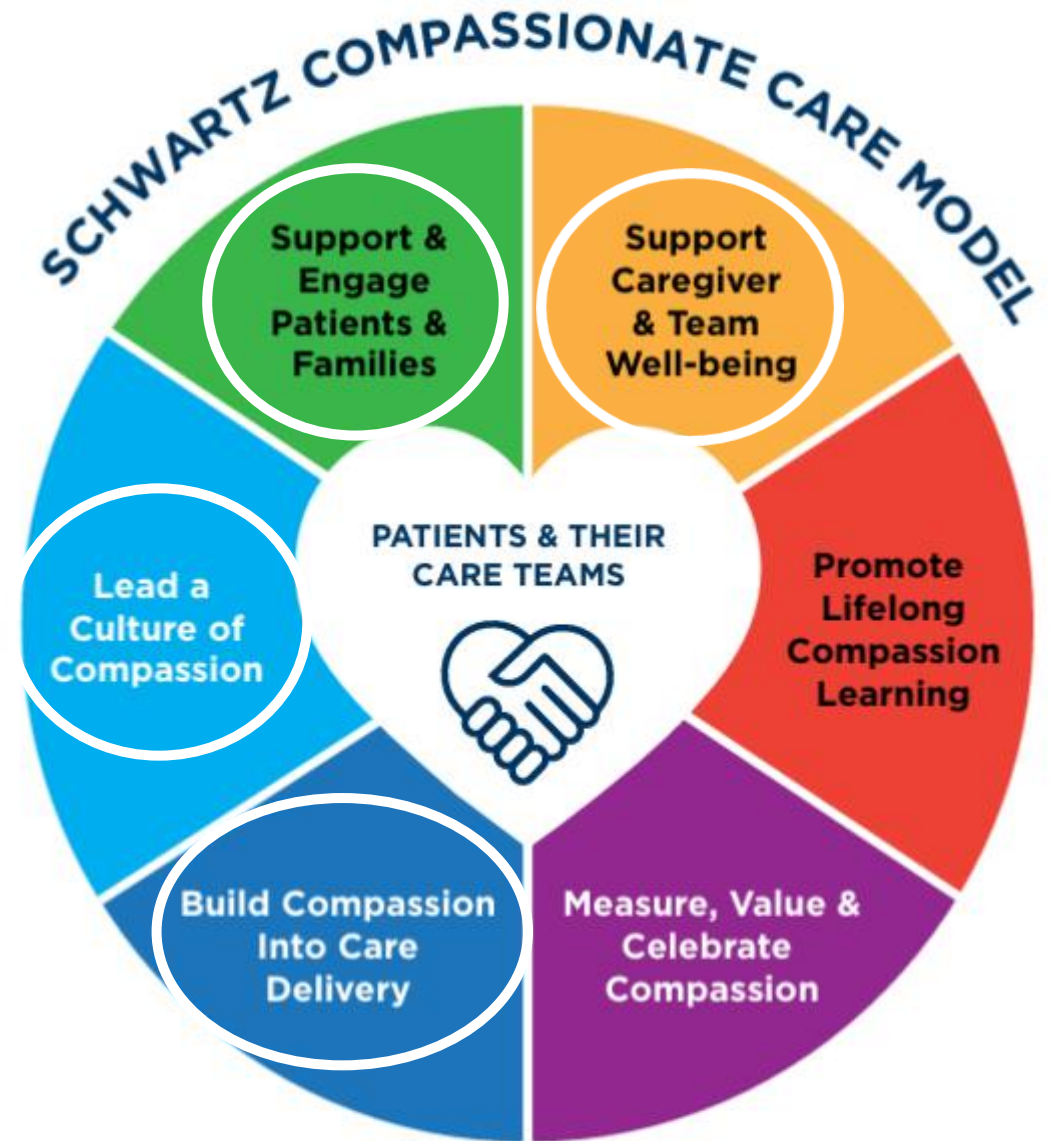


The effects of kindness media (EnSpire) in healthcare



- *EnSpire exerts many positive benefits*
- *Works within 2 mins*
- *No training needed*
- *Low resource needs*
- *Multiple implications for burnout, incivility, and patient aggressiveness and violence*

Our work encompasses several facets of the Schwartz Compassionate Care Model



Compassion Quote

"Compassionate people are geniuses in the art of living, more necessary to the dignity, security, and joy of humanity than the discoverers of knowledge."

ALBERT EINSTEIN

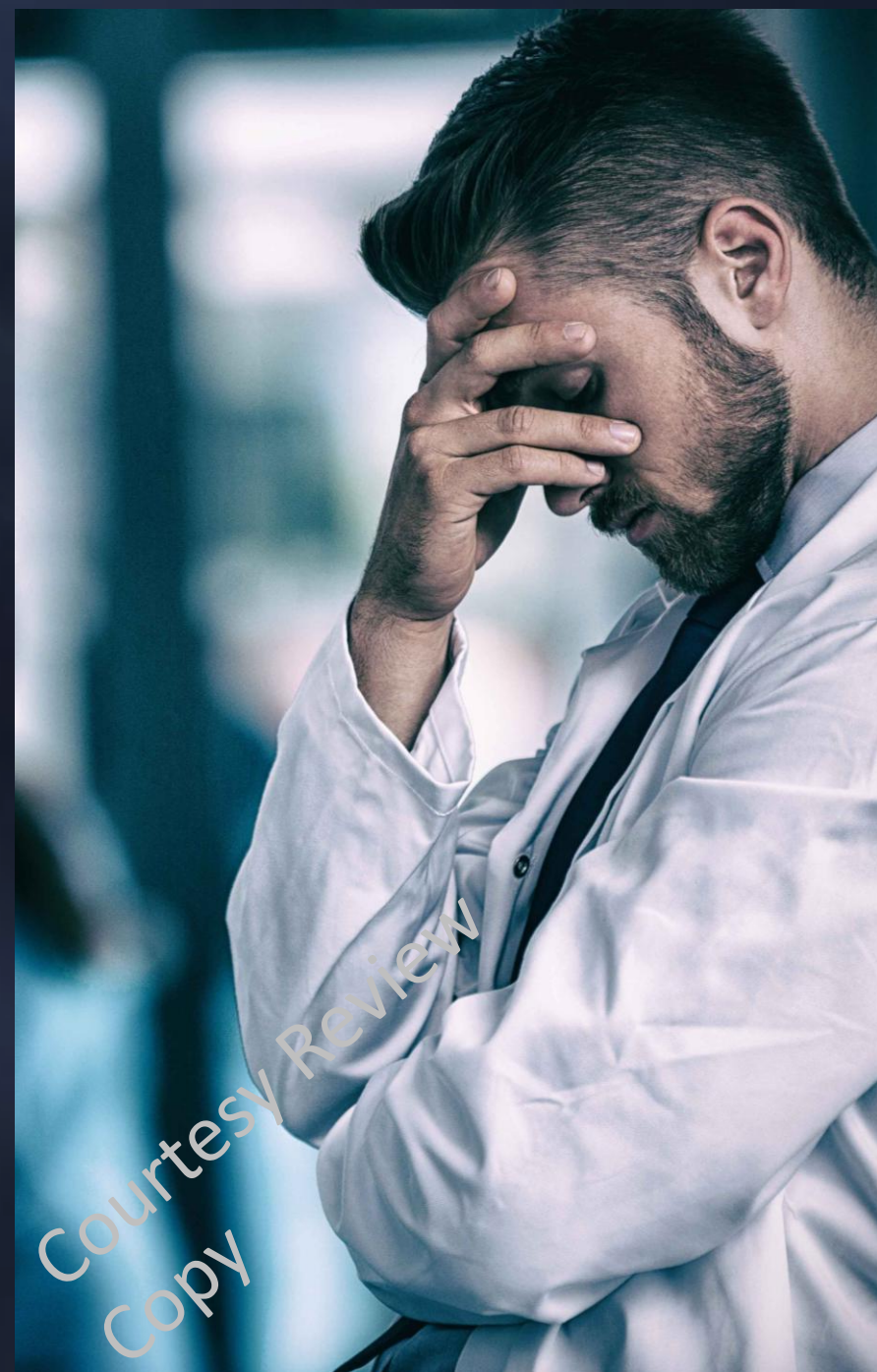
Physicist & Nobel Laureate

(1877 - 1955)

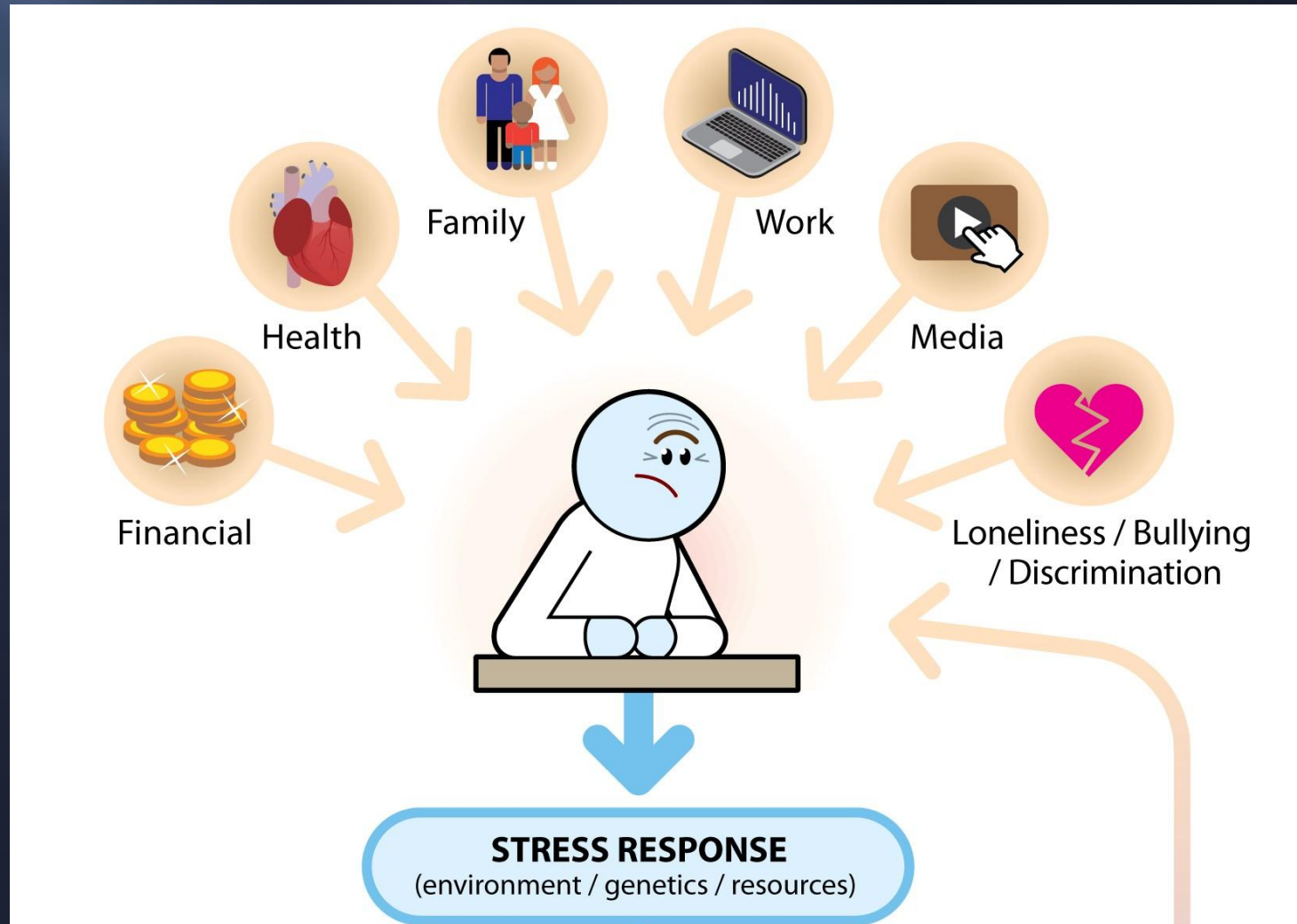


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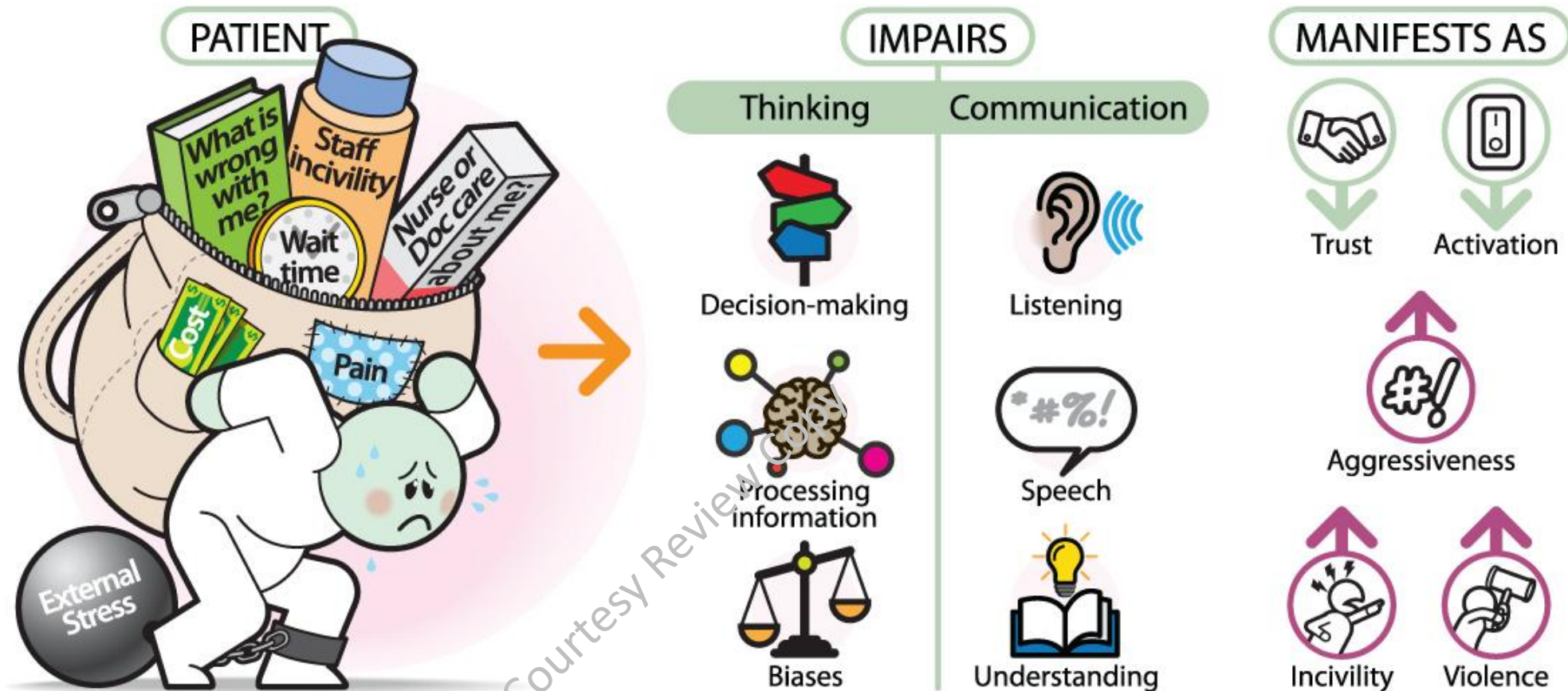
**To gain greater insight into
the importance of
kindness and
compassion*, we need to
review the effects of
stress in healthcare.**



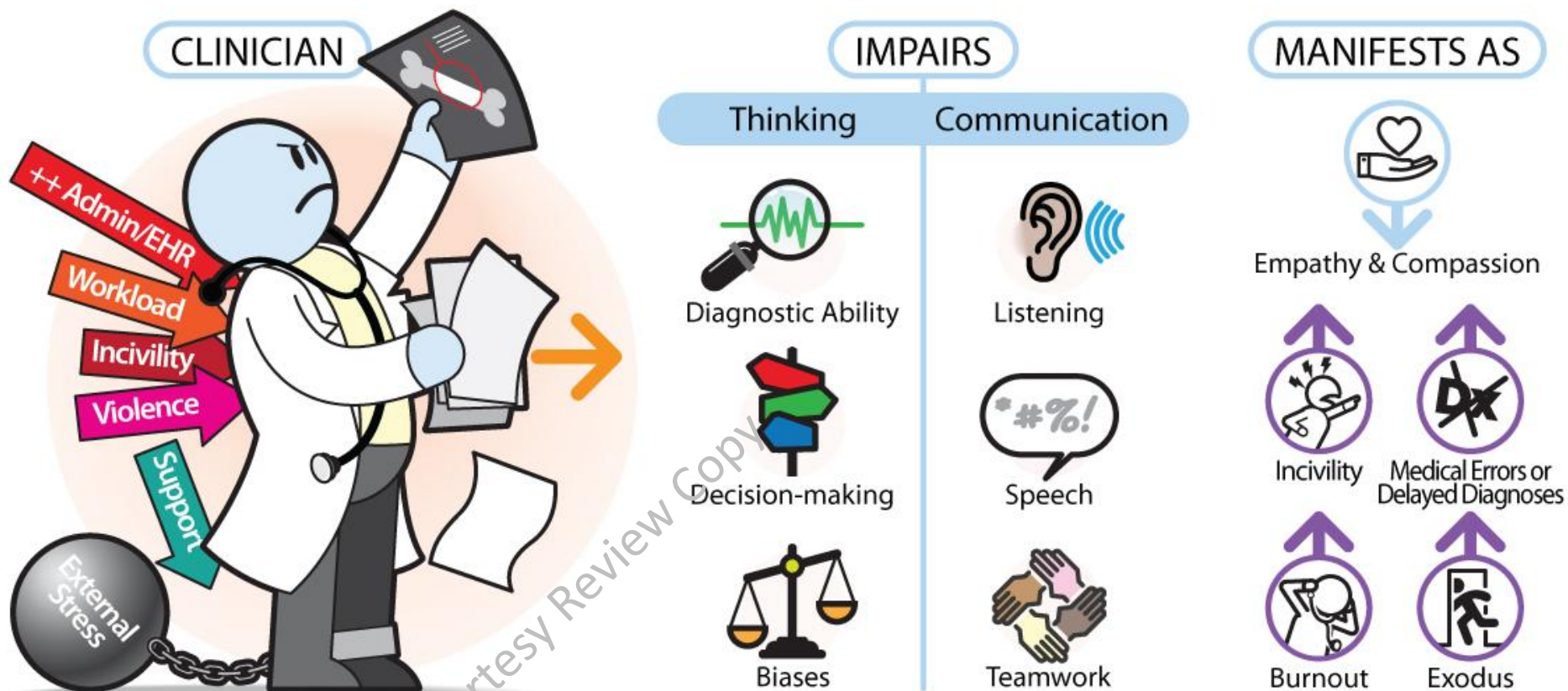
Everyone has multiple sources of stress



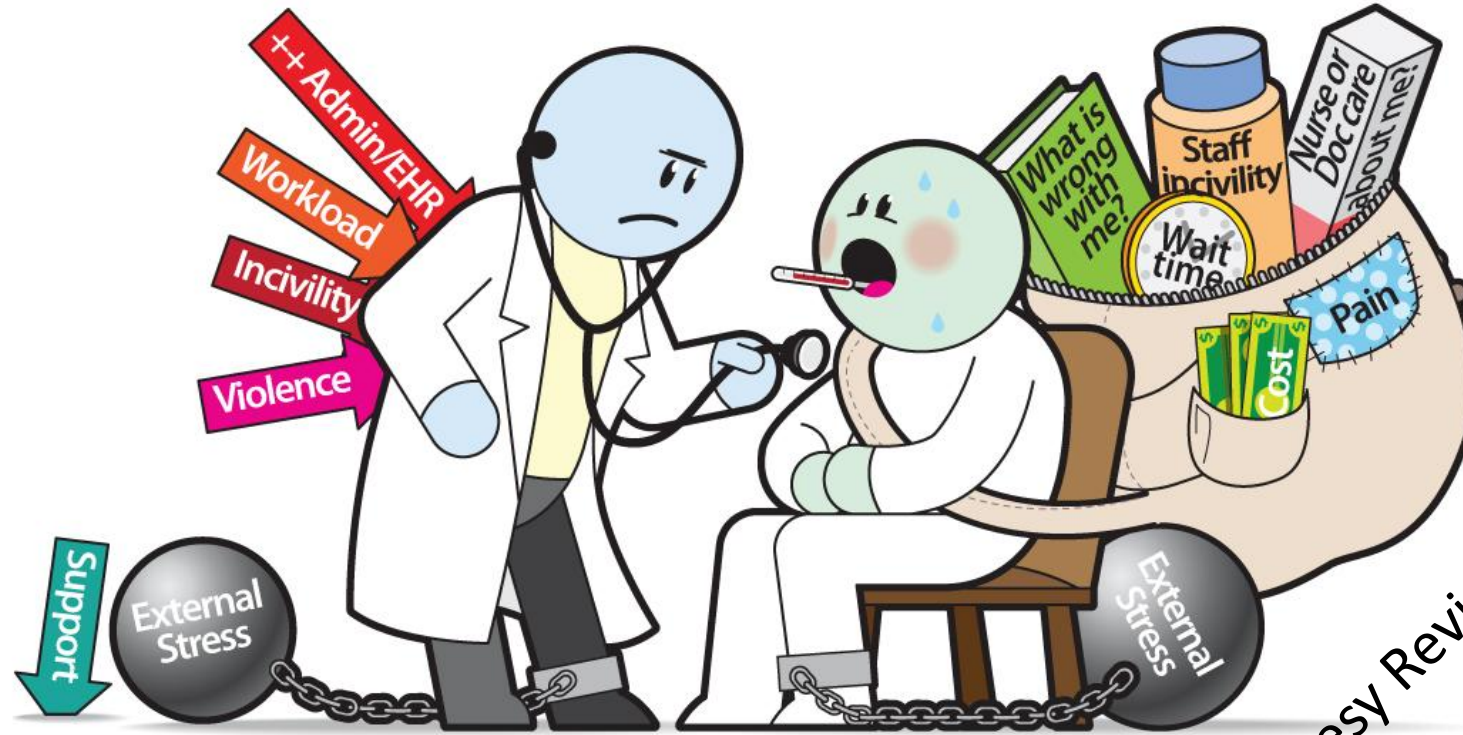
Patient Stressors Affect Them In Multiple Ways



Clinician Stressors Affect Them In Multiple Ways



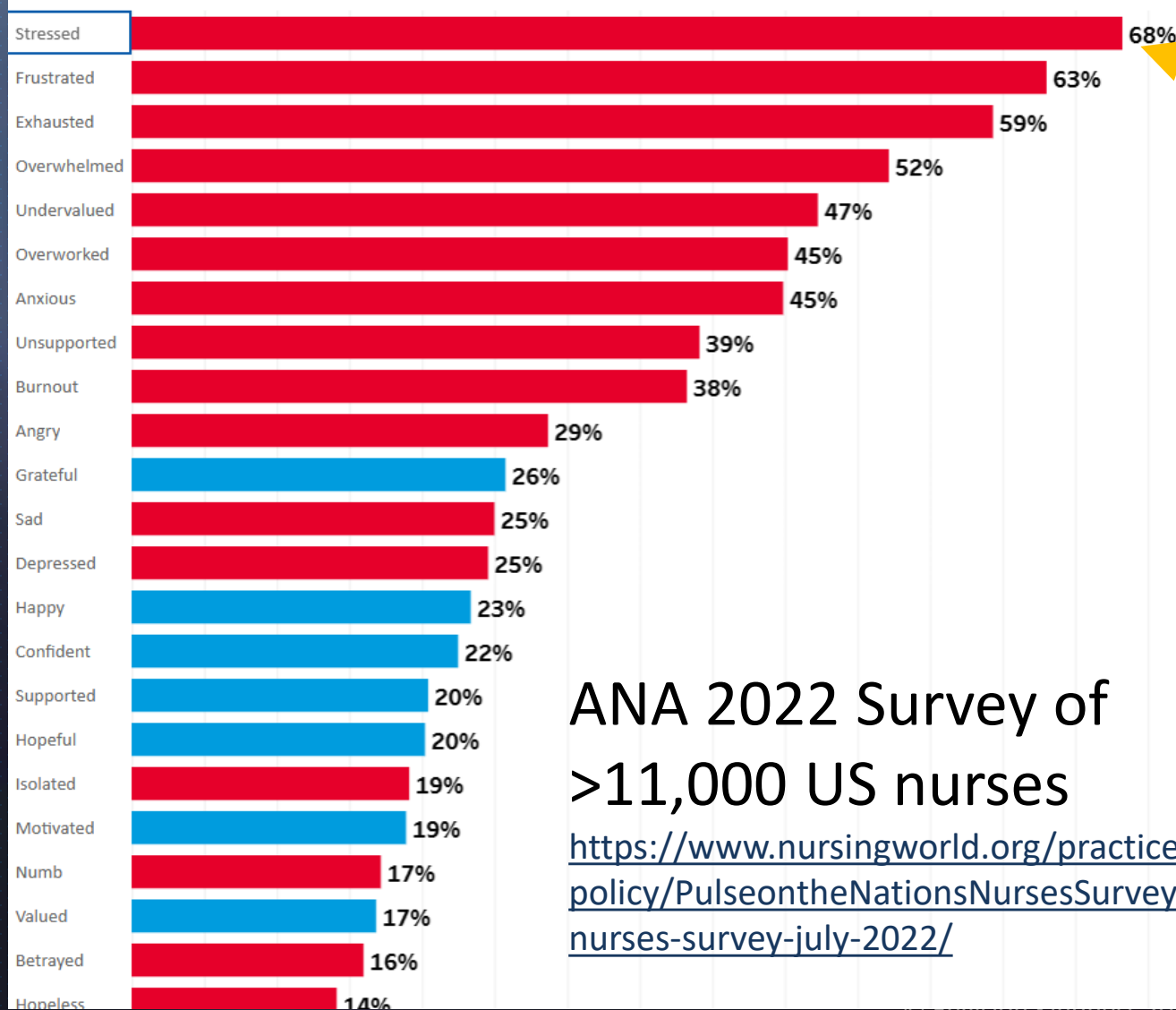
What happens when two stressed people come together for a critical, time-limited interaction?



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Stress Prevalence In Nurses Remains Very High

In the past 14 days, have you experienced any of the following feelings? Select all that apply.



ANA 2022 Survey of
>11,000 US nurses

<https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/PulseontheNationsNursesSurvey/nurses-survey-july-2022/>

© Envision Kindness 2022

BURNED OUT, UNDERVALUED, AND OVERWORKED

Nurses reported top challenges such as:



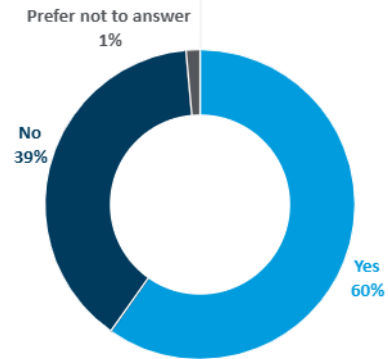
Beyond the Bedside: The State of Nursing in 2025 | www.crosscountry.com/beyondthebedside

Cross Country/FAU survey of
2600 US nurses and nursing
students

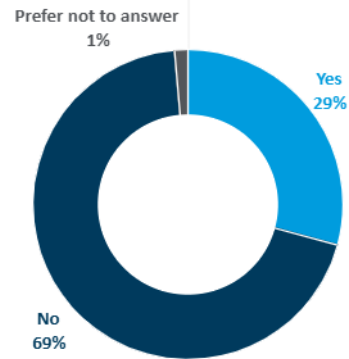
<https://www.crosscountry.com/beyondthebedside>

Most Nurses Experience Incivility and Bullying

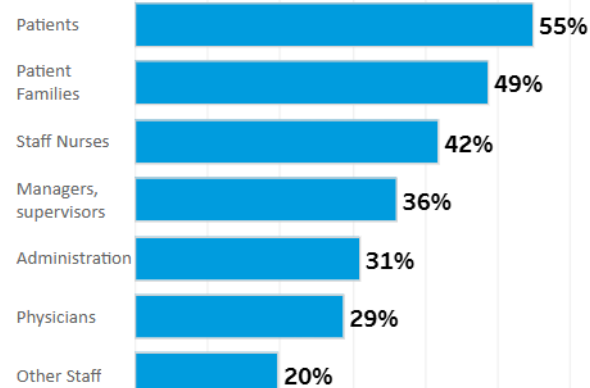
In the past year, have you experienced one or more incidents of violence, bullying, or incivility at work?
Bullying / Incivility



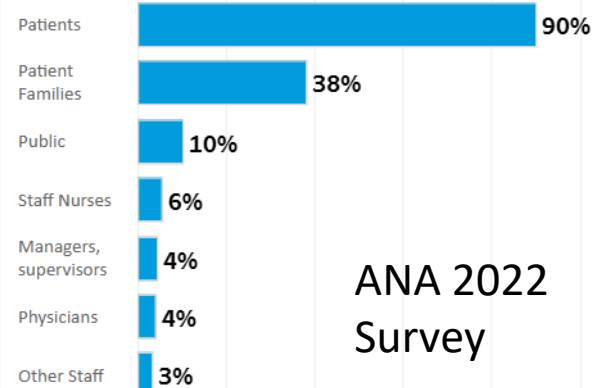
In the past year, have you experienced one or more incidents of violence, bullying, or incivility at work?
Violence



From whom have you received acts of incivility or bullying? Select all that apply.



From whom have you received acts of violence? Select all that apply.



ANA 2022
Survey



Cross Country/FAU 2025 Survey

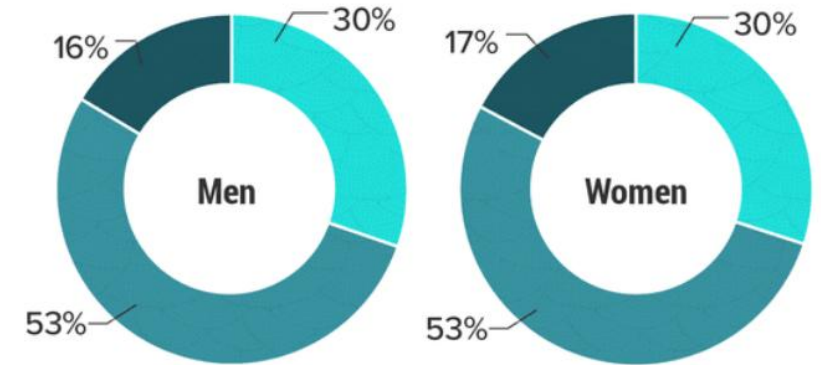
Physicians are highly stressed, too

- Medscape survey 2024
- Incivility #3 cause contributing to burnout
- <https://www.medscape.com/slideshow/2024-lifestyle-burnout-6016865#1>



How Much of Your Burnout and/or Depression Is Due to Job Stress?

● All of it ● Most of it ● Some of it



6/10

Nearly six in ten of physicians have experienced inappropriate feelings of anger, tearfulness or anxiety during the past year. (57%) Similar to 2021 and 2022 pandemic levels

46%

Nearly half report withdrawing from family/friends/co-workers. (46%) Significantly higher than last year

34%

More than one-third have felt hopeless or that they have no purpose. (34%) Similar to 2022 and 2021 pandemic levels

55%

More than half have felt levels of debilitating stress.

2025 survey results
of >1,000 physicians



<https://physiciansfoundation.org/research/the-state-of-america-physicians-2025-wellbeing-survey/>

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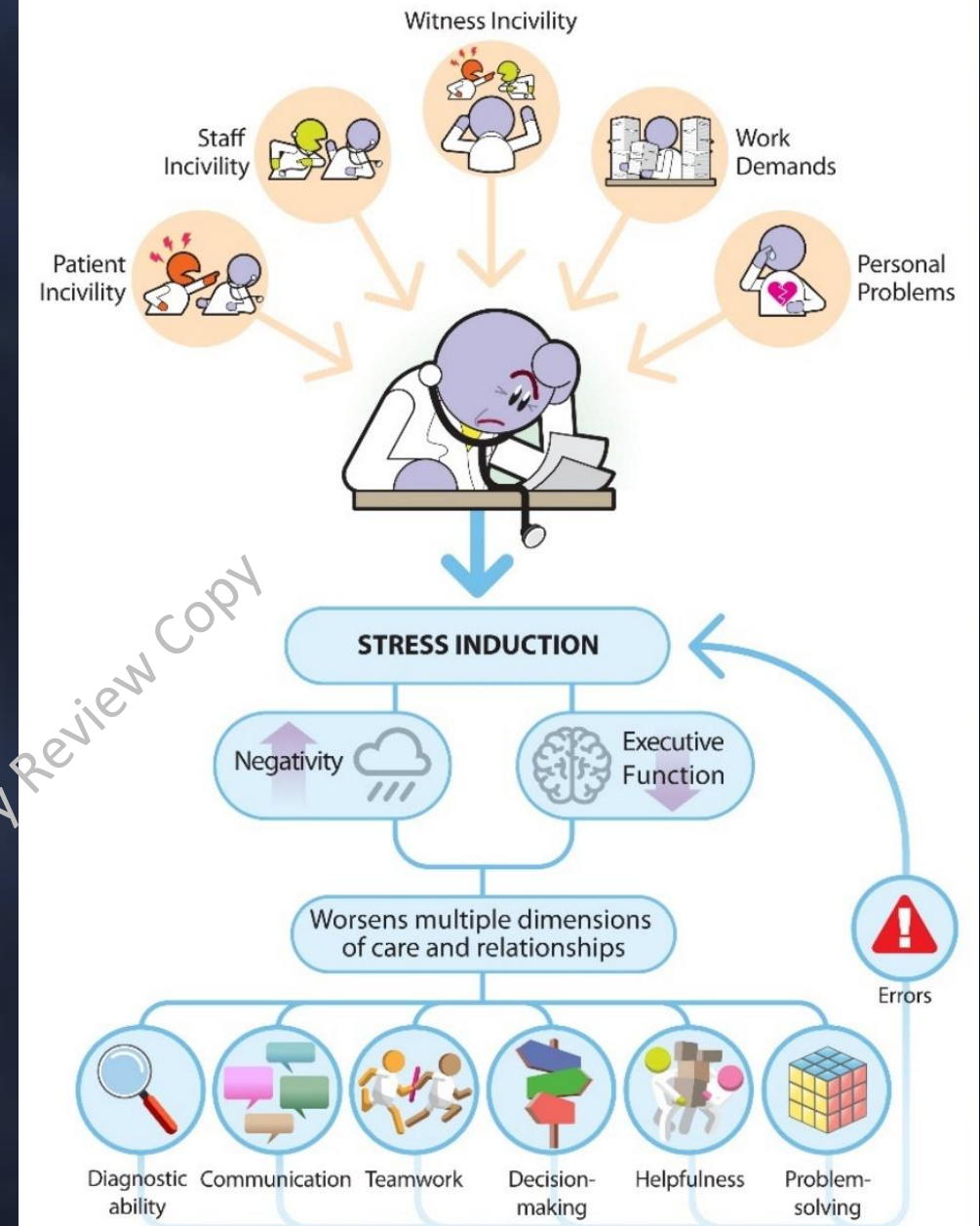
Incivility (unkindness) is both a product, and cause, of stress

- Profound effects on how clinicians think and feel and provide care
- Creates vicious cycle—as performance drops, stress increases
- Burnout and errors are predictable outcomes

Fryburg, DA: *Kindness Isn't Just about Being Nice: The Value Proposition of Kindness as Viewed through the Lens of Incivility in the Healthcare Workplace.* Behav Sci 2023

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Violence (verbal and physical) is very common at many health care organizations

Attacks at medical centers show why health care is one of the nation's most violent fields



- *Nurses most commonly bear the brunt of patient aggressiveness and violence*
- *Contributes to burnout, errors, and turnover*
- *Providing a safer environment is critical to all outcomes*
- *Beyond deterrence, proactively promote kindness and connection*
- *Violence costs, on average \$3MM/hospital/year (AHA).*

Our hospital
is a healing
environment.

**Aggressive
behavior
will NOT
be tolerated.**

Examples of aggressive
behavior include:

- ▶ Physical assault
- ▶ Verbal harassment
- ▶ Abusive or foul language
- ▶ Threats
- ▶ Failure to respond to staff instructions

There is zero tolerance for all forms of
aggressive behavior. Incidents may result in
removal from this facility.

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The Big Questions

- **How do we:**
 - Lower stress in general while we work on solutions to specific problems?
 - Involve patients as well as clinicians and staff so they are helping each other?
 - Promote kindness and compassion on a daily basis without having to directly tell people to do it?

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@ Envision Kindness 2026



A solution: promote kindness and caring on a broad scale through media

- Positively shift medical care emotional and spiritual environment
 - Lower stress responses for everyone
- Help naturally foster a culture of connection in which people treat each other better
 - Psychological safety and well-being achieved through connection



This is a combined patient satisfaction, clinician and staff wellness approach

Recognize that each party
affects the other

Proactively help all stakeholders
(preventive approach)



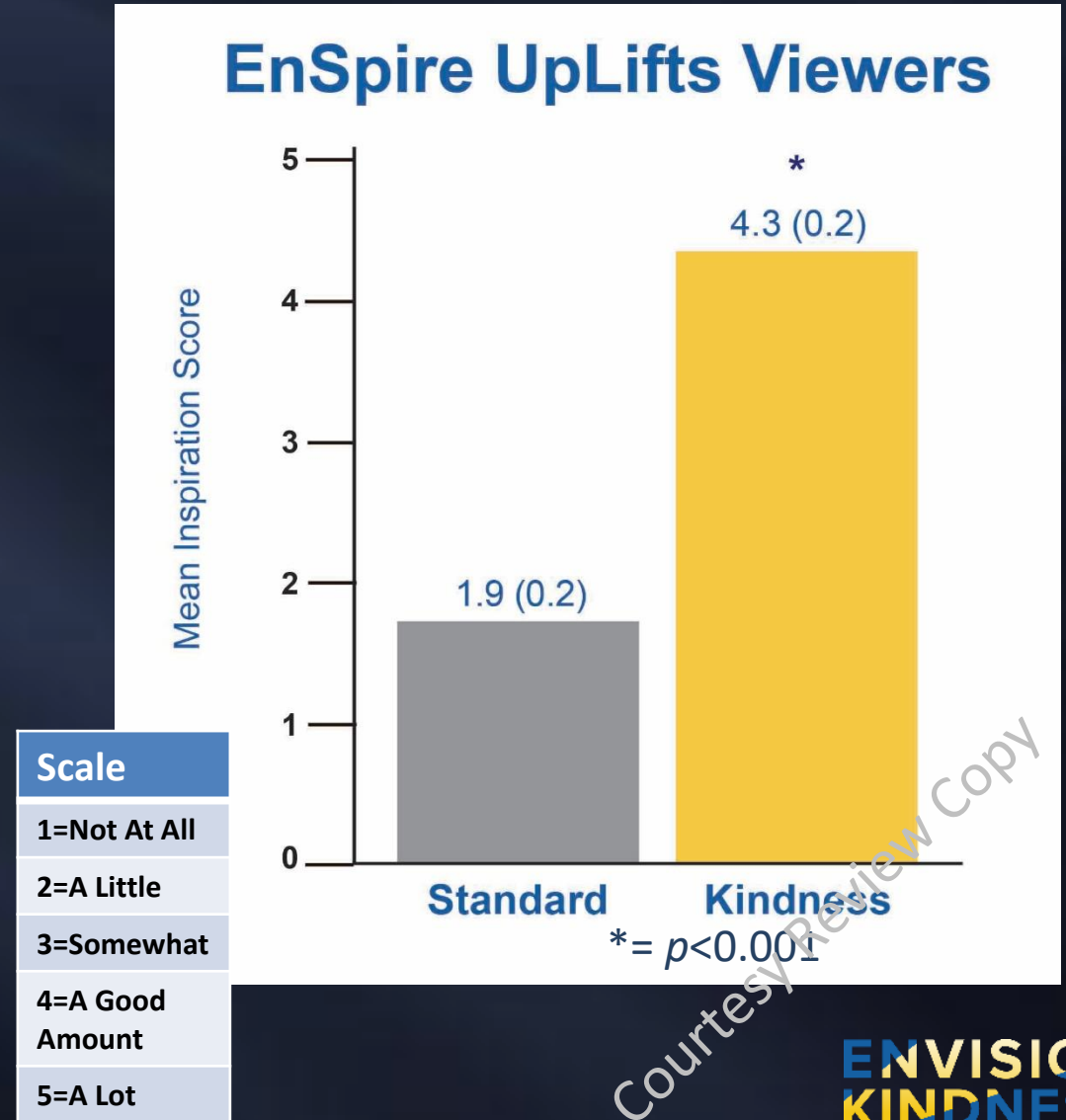
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Kindness Media in Health Care: Results From Study in Pediatric Dentistry Office

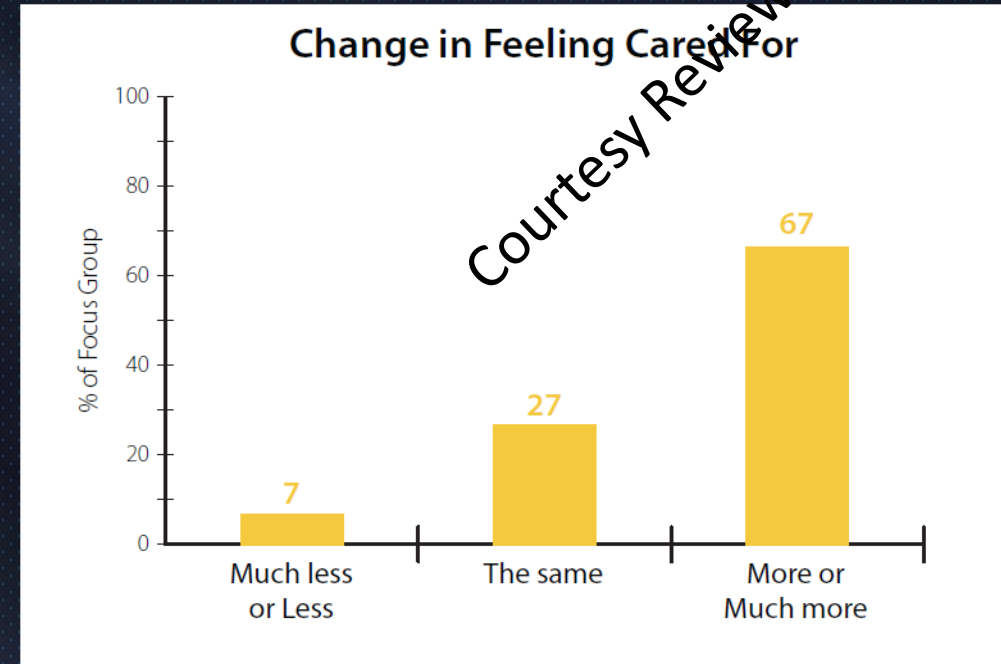
- Real world study
- 50 participants
- Comparator: children's commercial TV
- EnSpire ↑ self-report of being:
 - Inspired (shown)
 - Happy
 - Calm
 - Grateful
- ↑ Generosity—donation to needy family

*Fryburg et al: *Kindness media rapidly inspires viewers and promotes happiness, calm, gratitude, and generosity in a health care setting.* Frontiers in Psych 2021
© Envision Kindness 2022



Patient Focus Panel (n=15)

- Total of 15 participants
- Wisconsin adults
- 9F/6M
- Ages: 25-58 (3B/3L/9W)
- Saw one video: *“Why do hugs feel so good?”*
- Qualitative and quantitative feedback



Emotion	Irritation	Anxiety	Sadness	Stress	Happiness	Calm	Connected to others
Effect*	↓ (87%)	↓ (80%)	↓ (73%)	↓ (73%)	↑ (80%)	↑ (87%)	↑ (80%)

*= direction of effect and % of participants

**Study:
Effects of EnSpire on
patient care
satisfaction in a
level 1 trauma ED
waiting area**



Kindness Media Affects ED Patient Care Satisfaction

Key ED Survey Questions Total n responses=3176	EnSpire Viewer Top Box % ↑ (range)*
Courtesy of the nurses	7-23%**
Courtesy of the doctors	7-33%**
Doctors listened to me	9-30%**
Staff treated me with courtesy and respect	11-31%**
Likelihood of recommending our ED	5-30%**
Overall rating of care	9-23%**

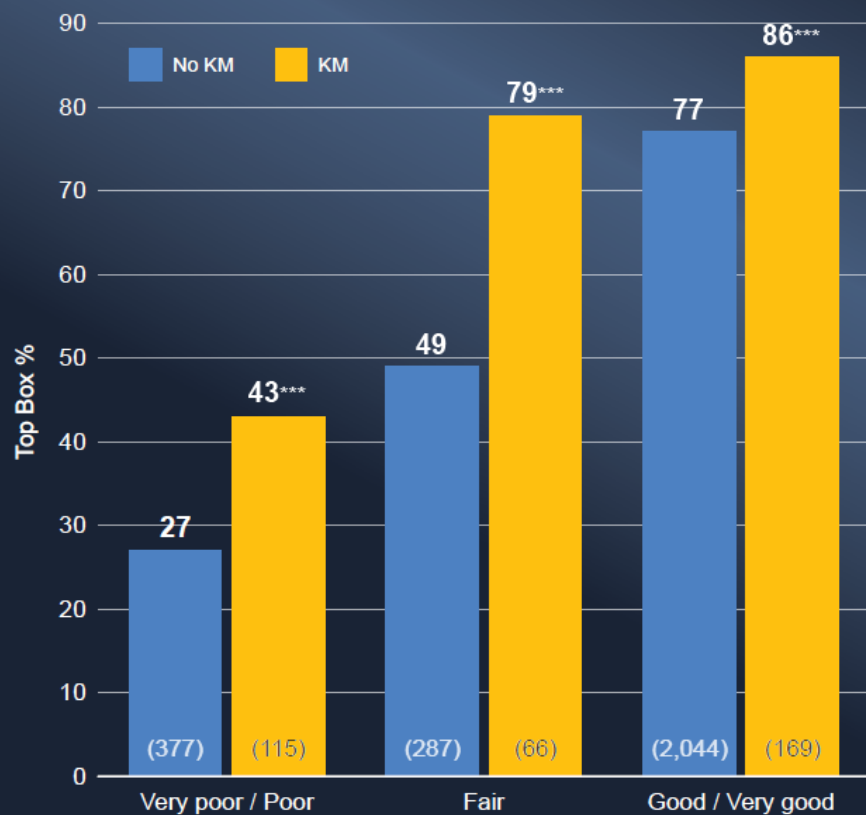


* Compared to those who did not watch EnSpire. Top box results stratified by waiting time—displaying minimal/maximal difference.

Fryburg, D; Mueller, S, et al: Promoting kindness through media increases patient satisfaction in an emergency department: a simple intervention to uplift patients and lower stress BMJ Leader 2025

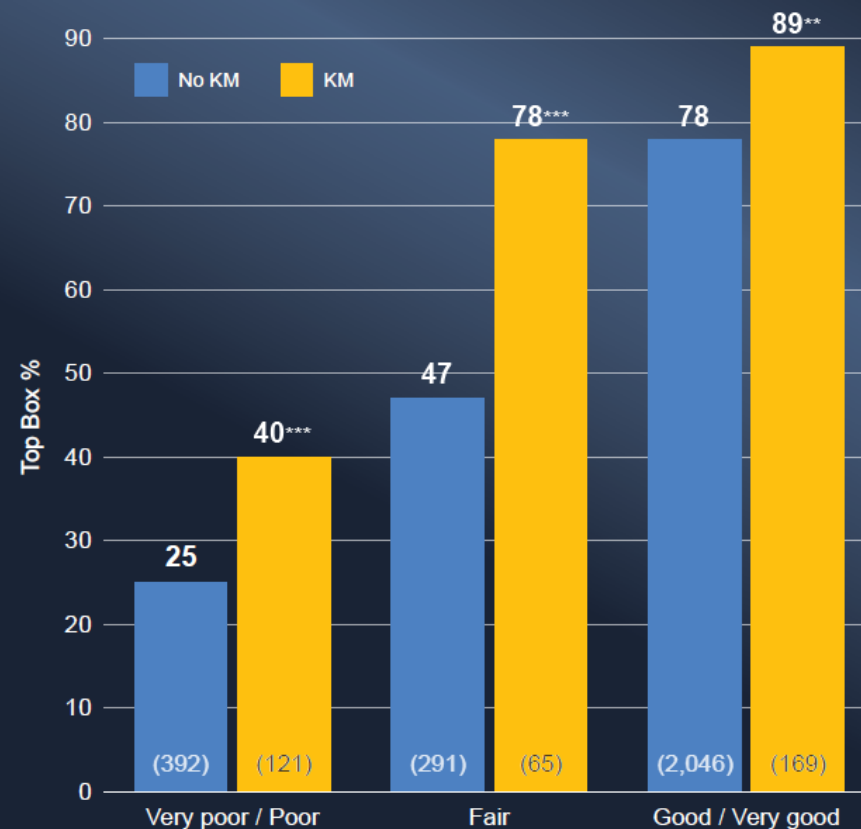
Top Box Scores Stratified By Waiting Time And Media

How well the doctors took the time to listen to you



***=<0.001 **=<0.05 v No KM

Staff treated you with respect and dignity



Fryburg, D; Mueller, S, et al: Promoting kindness through media increases patient satisfaction in an emergency department: a simple intervention to uplift patients and lower stress BMJ Leader 2025

In-hospital study of clinical staff

- Monitors in hallways
- Baseline-controlled design
- Progressive, step-wise rollout (time control)
- 2-week exposure nursing and medical staff (190 total)
- Surveys revealed less stress, greater civility and respect



Surgical Floor—very brief exposure

From Professor Of Anesthesiology:

*“In our months of displaying the kindness media I received several compliments from the staff about the positive effect the images and videos had on them. **Some saw it as a “quick pick me up”, while others spoke about how it affected their mood throughout the day.***

The impact the media has had on our floor has been palpable, and we aim to continue to use it in the future!”

Study: healthcare offices

- Completed surveys
- Dentist's office:
 - Receptionists go into waiting room on stressful day—quickly recharge and go back to work
 - By report, many patients yield positive comments to receptionists
- Urgent Care: patients report much less stress.



Office survey data (n=90)

Survey Question	% of participants
After watching the videos I felt happier	96%
After watching the videos I felt uplifted	80%
After watching the videos I felt more connected to others	80%
After watching the videos my stress level decreased	74%
I would recommend that the videos continue to be shown at this practice	83%
I would recommend that the videos be shown in other health care practices	80%

Survey responses acquired in dentist, urgent care, ambulatory care, and counseling center waiting areas

Unsolicited feedback

EnSpire

“It's been heartwarming to see the impact of the "Envision Kindness" in our waiting room. ***Not only does it seem to relax our patients***, but it also sparks interesting conversations and positive reflections. “

“I found myself so captivated by the program. ***It's uplifting to see*** such heartwarming stories.”

“Watching these acts of kindness is a breath of fresh air. It's a gentle reminder of the good in the world, right before my dental appointment, ***which honestly helps me relax more than I expected.***”

“A patient leaving the office independently said how much she liked the media and how it made her feel very calm. ***She also offered that she would come to sit in the office (on a day that she didn't have an appointment) to feel calmer.*** She was encouraging that we keep up the good work. “

Recent feedback

EnSpire

“It's been heartwarming to see the impact of the "Envision Kindness" in our waiting room.

“I was really stressed coming into this meeting.

Not only does it help our patients, but it also sparks

I watched that video—now I'm good to go.”

“I found myself so captivated by the program. It's uplifting to see such heartwarming stories.”

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“Watching these acts of kindness is a breath of fresh air. It's a gentle reminder of the good in the world, right before my eyes. It helps me relax more than I expected.”

“A patient leaving the office independently said how much she liked the

Hospital executive

she said how much she liked the program and how much she felt very calm. She also offered that she would come to sit in the office (on a day that she didn't have an appointment) to feel calmer. She was encouraging that we keep up the good work.”

And it can positively affect children



Why does this work so well?

- **We are born wired for kindness and caring**
- **Explains rapid response**
 - Works through automatic processing (subconscious)
 - Passive
- **Supported by multiple academic studies**
 - Other studies: ↑ interpersonal connection, generosity, and happiness
 - **Equivalent to meditation**
 - EnSpire is the applied science of kindness (prosocial) media



Creating a more caring environment



V. Glinka

Plant seeds of kindness and compassion daily



EnSpire: a portfolio of kindness media



- Short videos of acts of kindness, connection, and caring
- Concepts, humor, meditation, well-being exercises
- >80 videos
- Displayed in waiting areas, hallways, cafeterias, meetings
- Rapidly shifts emotional environment
- Only need television and digital signage to get its benefits
- No training required

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Complementary method to reach clinicians, staff, and patients

- Creating shorter pieces for quick delivery
- V. short video or static image
- For use in:
 - Communication apps
 - My portal
 - Staff communications
 - Workstations
 - Newsletters



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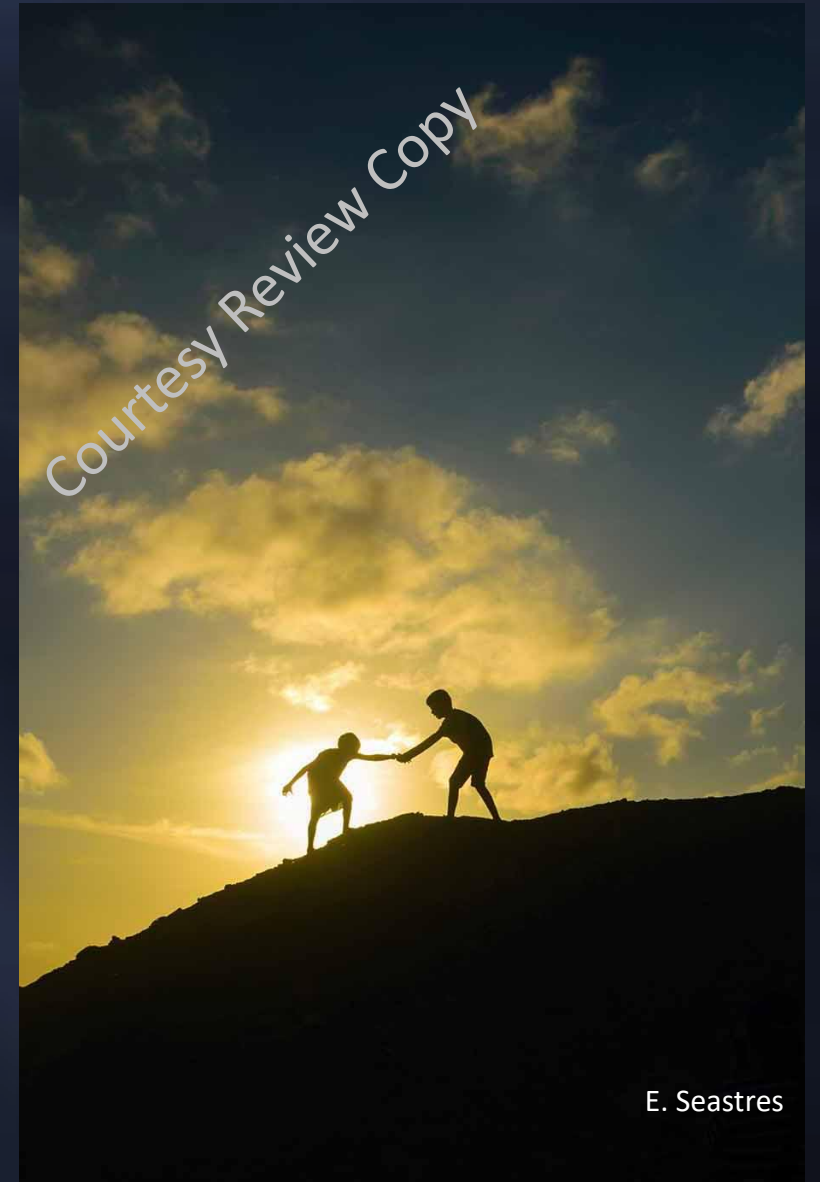
M. Dhanushka

Rapid EnSpire



Advantages of Kindness Media

- **Passive**—no training required
- **Rapid**—works subconsciously
- **Uplifting**: no criticism
- **Scientifically well-founded**
- **Disseminatable**—
 - Population level opportunity
- **Flexible**: Blend with specific messaging and training efforts
- **Relevance to inclusion**
- **Initiate multiple ripples**
- **Inexpensive**



E. Seastres

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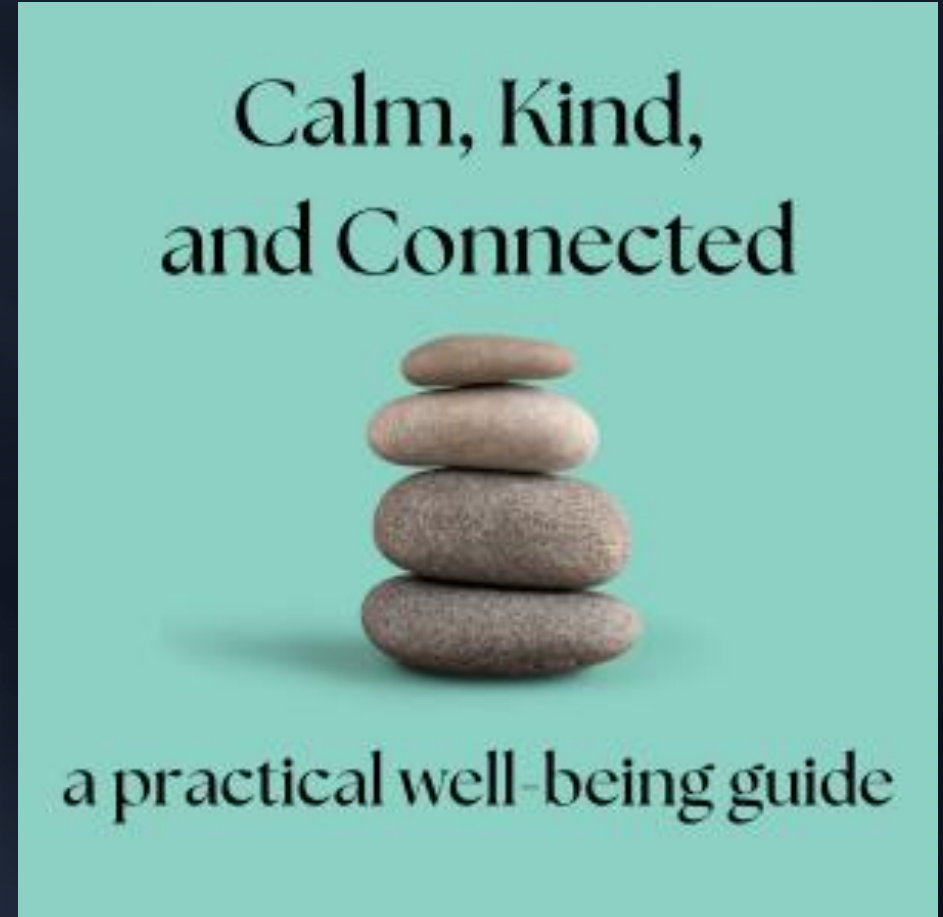
Provide specific tools for stress



S. Brown

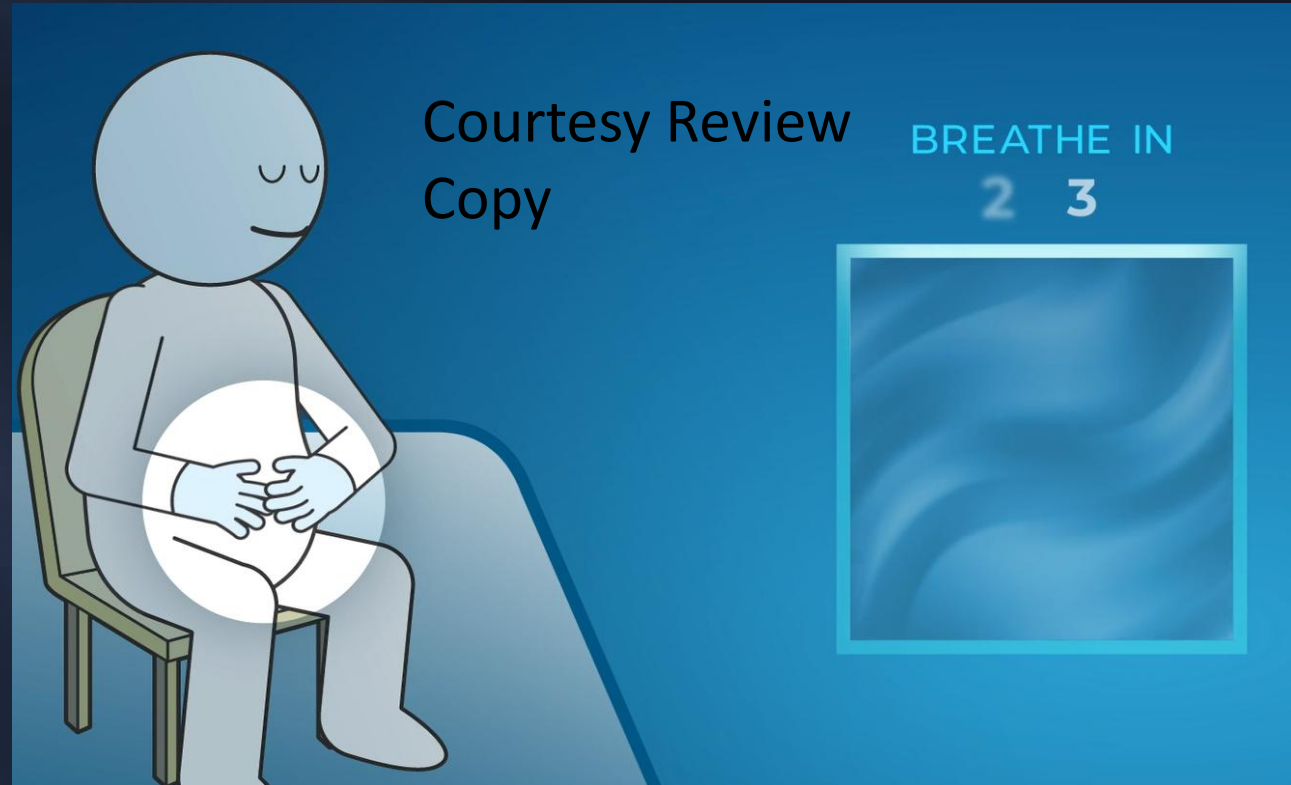
Wellbeing at Work Guide: Calm, Kind, and Connected

- Very accessible and practical tools to manage stress and relationships
- Focused on healthcare environment
- Sections include:
 - Labeling Emotions
 - Managing Emotions
 - Empathic Communication
 - Navigating difficult conversations (in dev)
 - Promoting kindness in an entire organization (in dev)
- Reviewed by psychologists, healthcare providers, et al



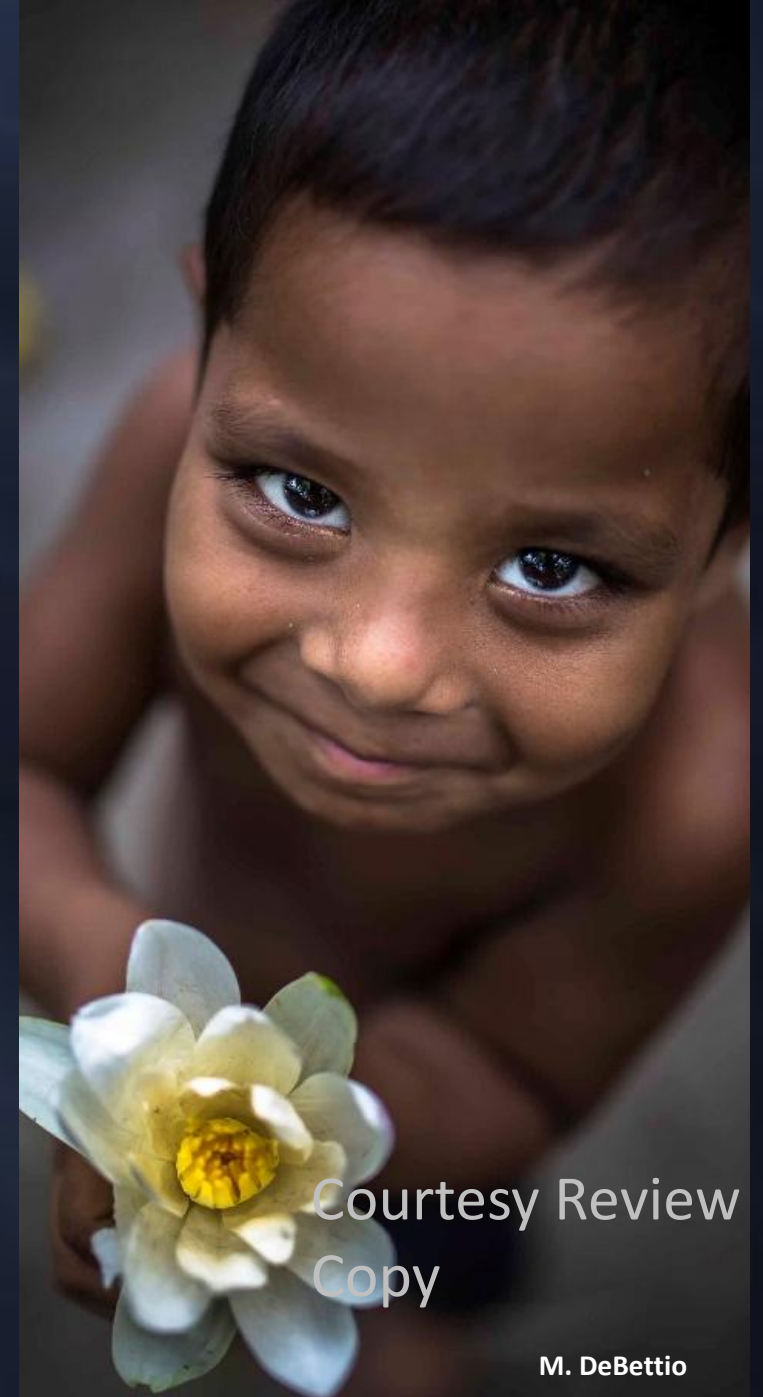
Incorporating CKC techniques into EnSpire

- Beyond availability on website, bring techniques to patients, families, and staff through media
 - Help reinforce methods
 - Lead viewers to rest of techniques
- **Ex: Square (box) breathing**
 - Navy SEAL technique
- **All CKC tools are freely accessible on website**



Reasons why some may discount promoting kindness and compassion in healthcare

- **Not directly compensated**
 - Need to generate revenue (or savings) to have value
 - K&C is *the way care* is delivered
- **People are predominantly selfish**
- **Too ill-defined**
 - K&C comes in many forms
- **Perceived lack of “hard” science**
- **Appears “soft”—impairs making hard decisions**
- **Hard to conceive on whole organization basis**
 - Not easy to engineer like a new MRI



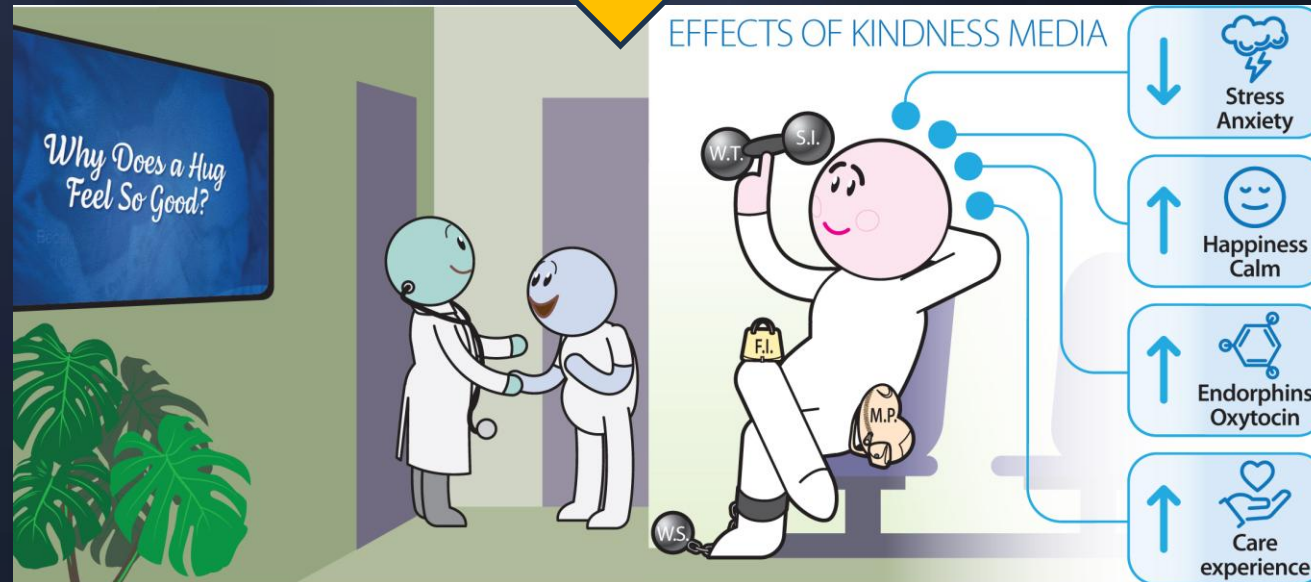
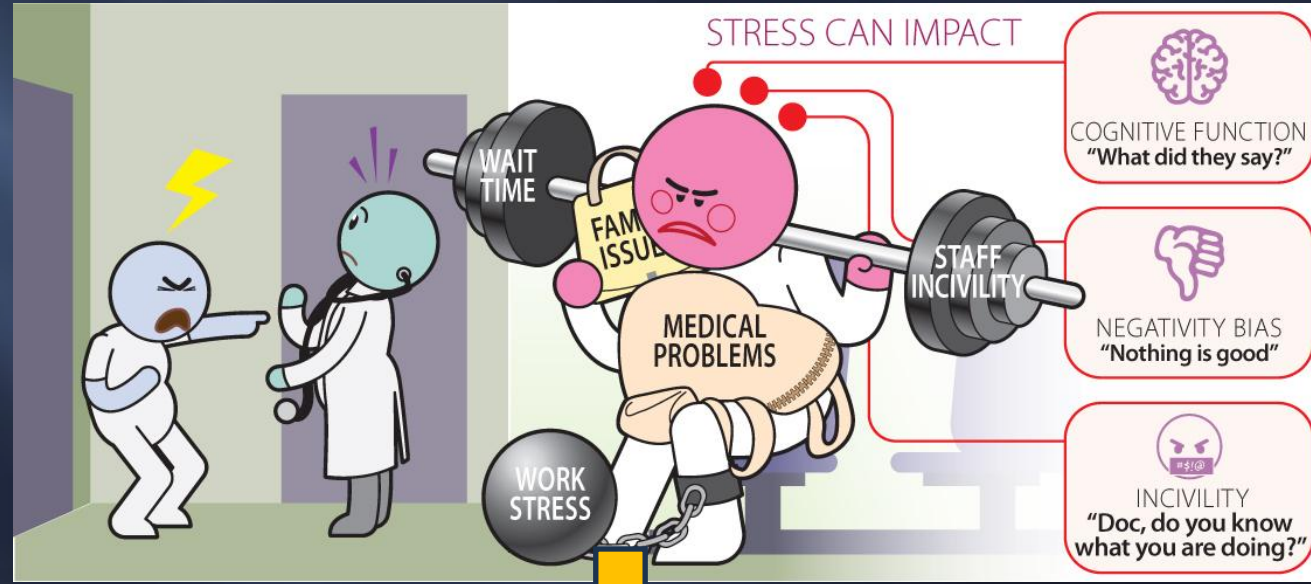
Kindness and Compassion Has Enormous ROI In Healthcare

As stress causes many costly problems, the fiscal rationale to dedicate efforts to K&C include:

Avoiding losses	Creating New Gains
Burnout/productivity	Patient satisfaction payment adjustments
Incivility	Reputation and Referrals (bragging rights)
Violence	Donations
Medical errors/ malpractice	Efficiency of interactions/teamwork
Reduced payments	Staff morale

These likely total millions per hospital per year, a significant fraction of operating margins.

It is quite possible to change the stress load of clinicians and patients



Fryburg, D; Mueller, S, et al:
Promoting kindness through
media increases patient
satisfaction in an emergency
department: a simple intervention
to uplift patients and lower stress
BMJ Leader 2025

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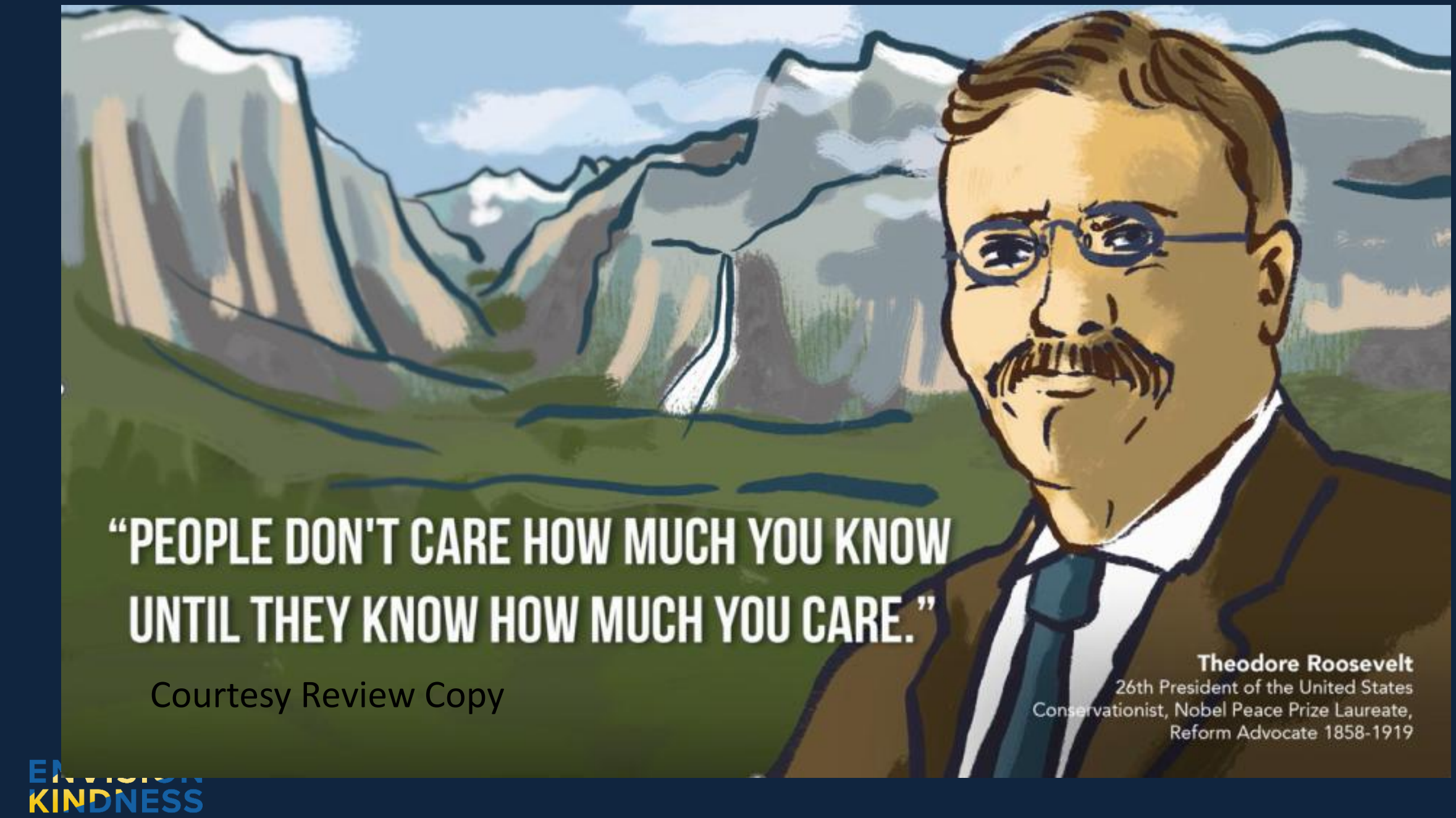
Kindness and compassion as a public health effort

- Disease/unhappiness begins in the community
- Imagine reaching into communities to foster more K&C
- Regularly help people reconnect to their own humanity and that of others
- Lots of possibilities regarding mental and physical health, strengthening community, etc.



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T. Wild



**“PEOPLE DON'T CARE HOW MUCH YOU KNOW
UNTIL THEY KNOW HOW MUCH YOU CARE.”**

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Theodore Roosevelt

26th President of the United States
Conservationist, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate,
Reform Advocate 1858-1919

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Thank you!
We welcome
collaborations!

For questions,
please contact
David Fryburg, M.D.
President,
Envision Kindness

david@envisionkindness.org

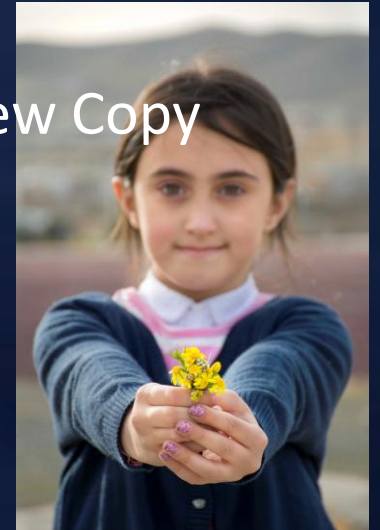
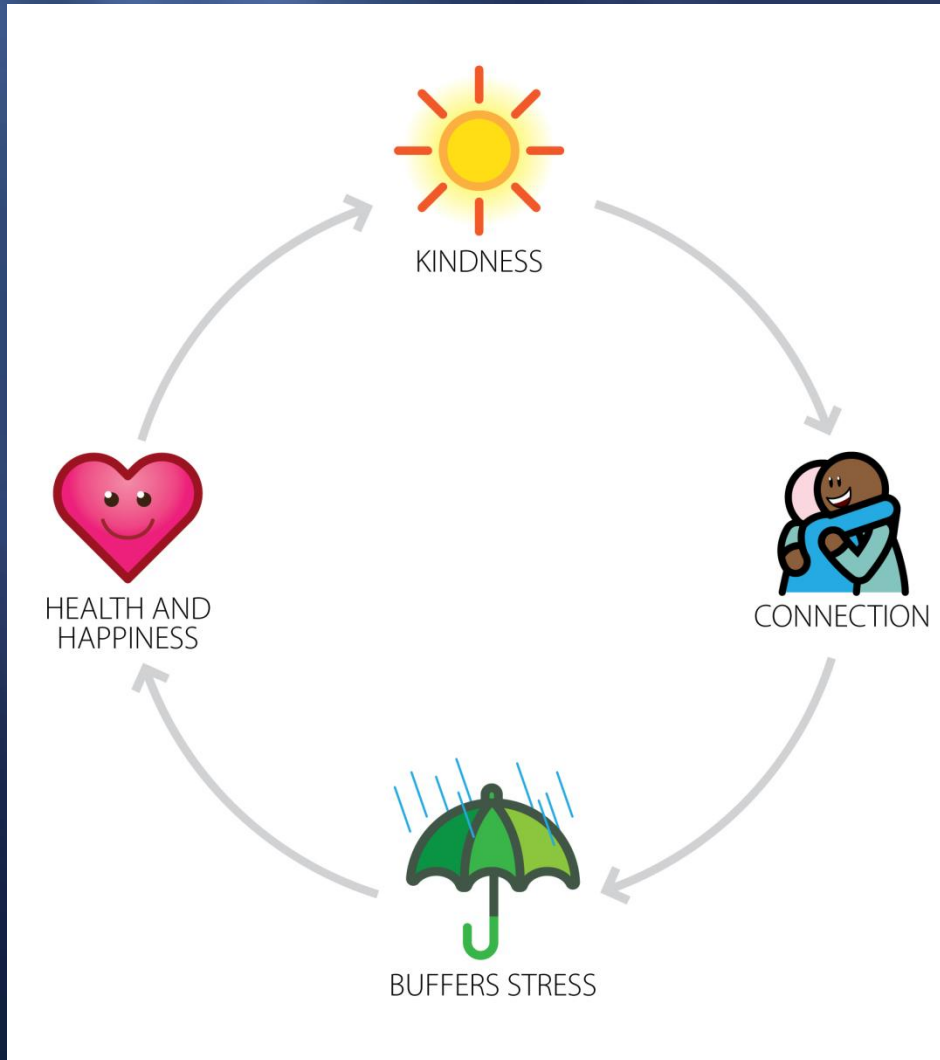


Photo by F. Faroutan



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