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CONTACT US:

To request an appointment, ask a question, consult about an issue of concern or find out more about the resources & services available through the PAP:

Call us at 800-777-1323
(or via TDD at 800-777-4969)

Visit us on the Internet at:
www.1stchoicedoc.com

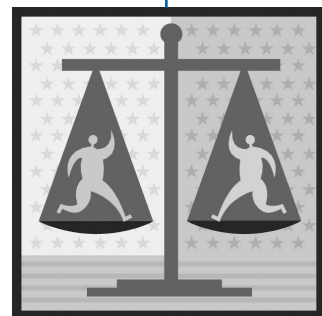
The First Choice Health Physician Assistance Program is dedicated to excellence in client care and customer service. We look forward to the opportunity to serve you anytime a need arises.

QUALITY, CONVENIENCE, & RELIABILITY

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. If specific health or medical advice or assistance is desired, the services of a licensed healthcare professional should be sought. The information in the First Choice Health PAP Quarterly Newsletter is not meant to replace the advice or expertise of your physician or healthcare provider. If you are experiencing health problems or contemplating lifestyle changes such as diet or exercise, consult your healthcare provider ahead of time to ensure your well being.

The PAP Quarterly Newsletter is published by
First Choice Health Physician Assistance Program

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Bringing Balance to Work, Home, and Life

DEDICATED TO EXCELLENCE

**Practice Management Strategies:
Bumper Sticker Wisdom**

David Burn, MS, NCC, CCMHC, LMHC, Director, Physician Assistance Programs

Years ago during a visit to Monterey and the coast of central California I discovered the aromatic community of Gilroy. Passing through in the midst of festival season, I discovered what was already known to countless travelers and passersby – Gilroy is the Garlic Capital of the World.

In this corner of the agricultural universe, every snack, comfort food and dessert you can think of is available in a garlic-enhanced version – including ice cream and trail mix. Residents of surrounding cities and towns merely sniff the air to determine the direction of the wind.

When it comes to the art of garlic, all roads lead to Gilroy.

A few weeks later I was back at work as a mental health counselor and taking a lunch break between client appointments. Driving to a sandwich shop I approached the stop-sign at a four-way intersection, pulling up behind a senior citizen in her 1962 Plymouth Fury. She was waiting her turn at the intersection and I noticed a sticker on the left-rear bumper inviting readers to **Honk If You Love Garlic!**

Amused by memories of the sights and scents of Gilroy, I responded playfully - honking just once (*with enthusiasm*) and giving the “thumbs up” signal of friendly appreciation. I expected a smile in the rear-view mirror or a half-hearted wave of agreement in return.

Instead, startled and unaware of my intentions, the little old lady from Pasadena went lickity-split from brakes to accelerator, rocketing into an already occupied intersection. Luckily, the result was nothing worse than a three-car fender bender. I sat hand-over-mouth for a few seconds before jumping out of the car to offer assistance (the voice in my head making it clear that my inner-honker had almost certainly been too helpful already).

Reflecting on this experience, it struck me that - just like the driver of the Plymouth Fury, and just like me - most of us have, at best, partial or inconsistent awareness about the information, invitations and messages we’re broadcasting to the people around us. The bumper sticker messages we overlook or forget to change are the words we use, how we say things, the tones we use, our attitudes, our body language, the things we take personal responsibility for (or avoid), and the choices we make - our actions, inactions and behaviors.

We frequently assume that others understand where we’re coming from and why we’re doing what we do.

The surprising, sometimes unexpected actions and reactions of others – patients, practice partners, staff members, professional colleagues, spouses, kids, commuters and little old ladies – invite us to become less reliant upon the convenience of cruise-control and pay more attention to what and why and how we’re communicating. With practice we can become purposeful about the signals and messages we’re sending. Accomplishing this simple yet sophisticated change goes a long way toward minimizing the stress and discomfort we create in our own lives. What message is your bumper sticker sending?

With autumn in the air, the resumption of hectic practice schedules, a predictably busy holiday season on the horizon and unforeseen challenges lurking at the next intersection, the PAP Customer Service Team encourages you to remember that change brings with it opportunity for personal growth and renewal. Whatever goals you’re planning to accomplish in the weeks, months and year ahead, success will largely be determined by your responses to circumstances and situations that rise up to meet you. Make sure that the messages you’re sending are consistent with your mission statement, intentions, goals, and desired outcomes.

When it comes to the art of increasing your effectiveness, minimizing misunderstanding, juggling time and managing the conflicts and demands of modern life, being ready, willing and able to peel away and replace your faded or outdated bumper stickers is a healthy, wisdom-filled strategy, indeed.



Online Work/Life Resources:

Our new self-serve menu of learning tools, information and state-of-the-art resources on topics and stages from infancy to adolescence to adulthood to senior living – and everything that happens in between – is available 24/7 at www.1stChoiceDoc.com - click the Work/Life Resources button:

Username: **firstchoice**

Password: **health2005**

A Primer on Change

Despite its inevitability people are reluctant about change. While change is a face familiar to everyone, each person responds in his or her own way. Change creates hesitation and resistance as well as curiosity and action. If some people have a knack for anticipating change and building bridges to desired outcomes, the majority of us seem to prefer to wait and see.

At least initially, change creates waves of stress. Hesitation is an attempt to protect ourselves from the stress of change. Novelty, inexperience and lack of information often create uncertainty. Change, not unlike *grief & loss* (see the PAP Summer 2005 Newsletter), is a process that involves stages (see *The Stages of Change* in this newsletter). Our forward motion or progress is influenced by our investment in making the change (what's in this for me?) and by our ability to embrace what is new (do I have the information and skills needed to do this?).

Whether we're naturally inclined to be passive or active in response to change, we benefit by learning as much as possible about the circumstances, studying our available options and resources, and using supportive, expert guidance when it's available.

You can learn to do change well. With opportunities for practicing change always right around the corner, you'll soon be creating forward momentum. Start by being purposeful and taking the time to do things differently (see *Bumper Sticker Wisdom* in this newsletter).

For ideas, resources and encouragement along the way, contact your PAP at (800) 777-1323 or by email at info@1stChoiceDoc.com.

**“A cloudy day is no match
for a sunny disposition.”**
-William Arthur Ward

1-800-777-1323

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The Stages of Change

Change is a natural process that's usually gradual but often the result of crisis. Change means that a way of doing things no longer fits. Large or small, changes create consequences in our lives. Policies and procedures, styles and tastes, roles and relationships, attitudes and behaviors – everything changes. From life experience, most people recognize the stages of change based on the descriptions below.

Pre-Contemplation: This is status quo. Nothing in particular is on my radar screen. Even if I'm aware of a problem I have no plans to change. Others may recognize a conflict, opportunity or need

for change but I'm on cruise control. I'm unaware, unconcerned or in denial.

Contemplation: Through input from others or difficulties I've encountered, I'm aware of a problem, conflict, opportunity or need for change. It's come to my attention and I'm thinking about it. I may be uncomfortable but for now I'm uncommitted to change. Aware of the situation or effects of my behavior, I may or may not decide to do anything about it.

Preparation: Weighing the pros and cons, I recognize that change is necessary. I may not yet have a firm grasp on how to change or when I will begin to

change. Putting in the least possible effort may still be more important to me than mobilizing my resources and doing change purposefully.

Action: I see benefits and value in making change. I am taking forward steps. I am increasingly self-motivated on the path. I am taking ownership. Consistent with the notion of responsibility, I am using my ability to respond. I am willing. Change is beginning to feel comfortable.

Maintenance: I have crossed a bridge from the old to the new. What's new feels increasingly natural and efficient. Other people notice my changes and this helps

Responding to Change

Remember that change is a normal, healthy part of living: While discomforting and inconveniencing at times, change is one of the spices of life. Change is what keeps us growing personally and professionally.

Try to anticipate change: Practicing flexibility in response to change can lessen stress when the need for change arises. Having a flexible plan for an ever-changing world is practical, realistic and good self-care.

Participating in change lightens your load: Moving forward by exercising your options (rather than getting stuck in the mud by “digging in your heels”) may be a better use of your time and energy. If you decide the changes you've made really don't work for you, you can always change your mind.

Use your support system and talk about it: Change invites you to involve the people and support systems in your life. Depending on the changes you're facing, talk to friends, family members, confidants and colleagues. Be curious about what others have learned (from experience) about change. You'll discover that you're not alone.

Remember First Choice Health: For ideas, perspective, encouragement, resources and confidential consultation about change in any area of life – *at work, at home, at school, at rest or at play* - contact First Choice Health PAP. You can reach us 24/7 at (800) 777-1323 or online at www.1stChoiceDoc.com.

to reinforce my decisions and efforts. I continue to refine and enhance my efforts, behaviors and attitudes. As a result of success I may consider making changes in other areas of my work or personal life.

Setbacks: Regressing to habits we're outgrowing is common. In times of stress human beings tend to return to what is familiar and comfortable. Setbacks can happen anywhere along the path of change and invite us to realize that change is fundamentally a matter of choice, being consistent, access to resources, and recognizing the advantages of the new behavior in your work, personal and family life.

An Exercise in Change

Modifying our assumptions is an excellent way to practice change. According to Susan Lucia Annunzio in *Contagious Success* (2004), the labels we use are roadblocks or building blocks to effectiveness. Our stress level rises and our effectiveness falls when we rely on negative labels.

Consider the following examples of “reframing” and practice increasing your effectiveness by shifting to a positive focus when dealing with others (or instead of judging yourself too harshly).

Negative Label

Impatient
Unprepared
Demanding
Overly Sensitive
Doubtful
Indecisive
Stubborn

Positive Label

Solution Focused
Spontaneous
Has Clear Vision
Very Perceptive
Curious
Open Minded
Determined

Index of Articles on Stress and Self-Care

With the goal of helping readers mobilize healthy emotional and behavioral responses to the conflicts and demands of life in a fast-paced world, First Choice Health has published many articles on the topic of responding to stress.

The most corrosive effects of stress often result from the way we think about what is happening to us and around us, rather than from events themselves. In support of your success, the PAP is pleased to remind you that all articles in our *Managing the Stress of Modern Living* series are available at your request.

Each article in the series is listed below. Call or email the PAP to request one or more articles for yourself or for the members of your practice staff and we'll send a personalized version of the article for your use.

- Bumper Sticker Wisdom**
- Responding to Grief & Loss**
- Stress in a Technology-Filled World**
- The Gifts That Keep on Giving**
- Communicating Effectively**
- The Mozart Effect: Music to Your Ears**
- The Building Blocks of Happiness**
- Effective Tools for Helping**
- Year Round Stress Reduction Strategies**
- The Healthy Advantages of Reaching Goals**
- Dealing With Difficult People**
- A Multitasking Survival Guide**

Contact First Choice Health Physician Assistance Program by phone at (800) 777-1323, by email at info@1stChoiceDoc.com or on the Web at www.1stChoiceDoc.com.