

# Why Gratitude Matters in Health Care

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THE GREATER GOOD SCIENCE CENTER AT UC BERKELEY

# What is Gratitude?

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A recognition that...

- There's goodness in our lives, gifts or benefits that we enjoy (and might often take for granted).
- This goodness is often due to the actions of another person. When we're grateful, we recognize the intention and effort that went into those actions on our behalf, and the benefits they gave us.

*(Emmons, 2003 & 2007)*

# How Can Gratitude Help Us?

Over the past two decades, studies have consistently identified strong benefits of gratitude for our minds, bodies, and relationships.



- Gratefulness increases happiness and life satisfaction.
- Grateful people are more resilient to stress.
- Grateful people get along better with others.
- Grateful people are less depressed.
- Grateful people achieve more.
- Grateful people are more helpful and generous.

# Gratitude Motivates

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Gratitude motivates people to make positive changes in their lives and in the world around them through feelings of:

- **CONNECTEDNESS:** Gratitude rewards us with a strong network of support and encouragement, leading us to feel that we are capable of tackling big challenges.
- **ELEVATION:** Gratitude helps us feel inspired and uplifted, motivating us to become healthier & more generous people and better & more productive workers.
- **HUMILITY:** Expressing gratitude forces us to recognize that our successes are due, at least in part, to the actions of others.
- **INDEBTEDNESS:** Gratitude encourages us to recognize and reciprocate the good that others have given us, thus ridding ourselves of psychological debts we carry.

# Gratitude in Health Care Settings

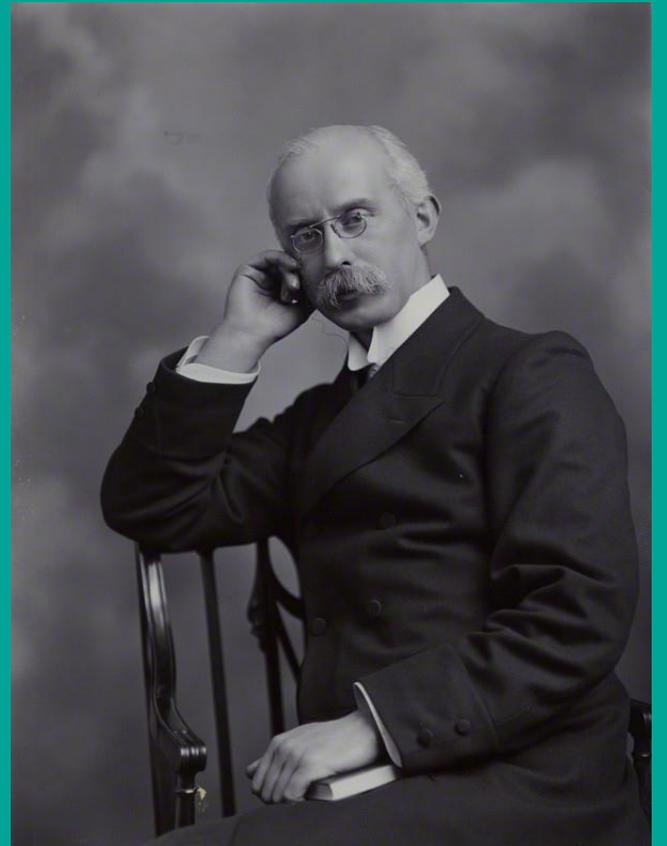
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HOW GRATITUDE SUPPORTS THE HEALTH OF  
PROVIDERS AND PATIENTS

# Why Gratitude in Health Care?

“Gratitude is a vaccine, an antitoxin, and an antiseptic.”

~ *John Henry Jowett, 1863–1923*

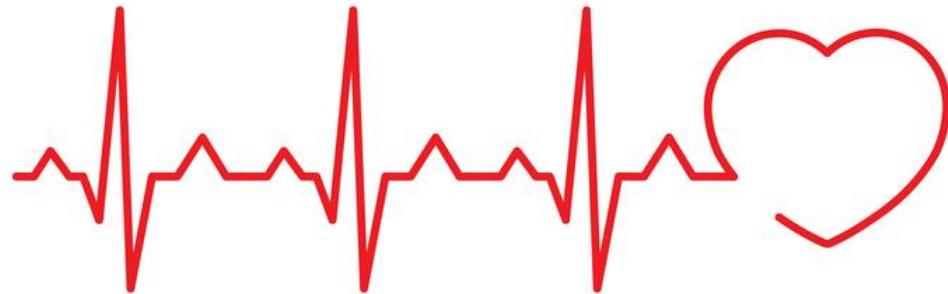


# Gratitude and Health

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## Improves

- Sleep
- Tendency to exercise
- Cardiovascular health
- Adherence to medication
- Mood, optimism, hope



## Reduces

- Substance abuse
- Fat intake
- Cortisol
- Blood pressure
- Suicidal thoughts
- Inflammation
- Perceived stress and depression in health care providers

# Gratitude Helps Patients

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*Study by Wong, Owen, Gabana & Gilman (2015):*

Adults & college students receiving mental health counseling (for depression/anxiety) were given these additional therapies:

- Group 1: Write 1 letter of gratitude to another person weekly for 3 weeks
- Group 2: Write about their deepest thoughts and feelings about stressful experiences
- Group 3: No writing activity

**RESULTS:**

- Group 1 reported significantly better mental health than the other groups 1 month after the writing exercise ended, then again 3 months after

# Gratitude Helps Patients

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*Study by Redwine et. al. (2016):*

Patients with Stage B heart failure were studied:

- Took blood samples
- Measured heart rates
- 50% of study participants kept a daily gratitude journal

**RESULTS:**

- Those who kept gratitude journals showed fewer biological signs that their heart disease was getting worse
- Showed healthier resting heart rate while journaling in the lab

# Gratitude Helps Patients

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## *Study by Huffman et al (2016):*

Participants who had a recent acute coronary event were asked to:

- Report on their levels of gratitude right afterwards, and 3 & 6 months later
- Keep track of physical activity with step counters

## RESULTS:

- Those who felt more grateful after their heart problems engaged in more healthy behaviors and reported better quality of life.



# Gratitude Helps Patients

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## *Study by Huffman et al (2014):*

Patients with psychiatric problems were given 1 of 9 positive psychological exercises to do over 8 weeks, including writing a gratitude letter and counting blessings.

### RESULTS:

- Patients reported less anxiety and depression than those who received standard treatments.
- Patients reported the greatest benefit from the gratitude exercises, especially the gratitude letter.



# Gratitude in the Workplace

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Surveys have found that:

- People are less likely to express thanks at work than anyplace else
- 60% NEVER or very rarely thanked anyone at work
- Only 10% expressed gratitude at work on a given day
- 35% worried that expressing gratitude would lead co-workers to take advantage of them



# Gratitude in the Workplace

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Yet surveys also show that:

- Saying “thanks” at work makes people feel happier and hearing “thanks” made them happier and more productive (by 50%!)
- Only 18% felt expressing gratitude made bosses seem weak; 93% said grateful bosses were more likely to succeed
- In general, “Thank you” from a supervisor boosts self-worth and self-efficacy; gratitude recipients become more trusting and more helpful
- According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the number one reason why people leave their jobs is because they don’t feel appreciated.

# Gratitude and Health Care Providers

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43% of nurses and **more than half** of physicians say they have struggled with **BURNOUT**.

**Burnout** is a complex state of being, generally defined by:

- Emotional exhaustion
- cynicism and callous attitudes towards others
- a reduced ability to be effective in our jobs and relationships.



# Gratitude Helps Health Care Providers

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*Study by Cheng, Tsui & Lam (2015):*

Health care providers twice weekly wrote down things for which they were grateful.

## RESULTS:

- Reductions in perceived stress (28%) and depression (16%) in health care practitioners
- “Such positive effects can also lead to an improvement in both productivity and quality of patient services.”



# Building a Culture of Gratitude

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM HEALTH CARE PARTNERS

# Building a Culture of Gratitude

## HARDWIRING GRATITUDE



Efforts to foster gratitude are most effective when they are baked into organizational culture, supporting individual practice while working toward systemic change.

# Building a Culture of Gratitude

## VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION



Expressions of gratitude and gratitude programs as a whole should not be forced on employees. Rather, gratitude needs to be fostered in a way that respects staff time.

# Building a Culture of Gratitude

## MAINTAINING AUTHENTICITY



Gratitude should be a practice that is encouraged and allowed to grow organically.

# Building a Culture of Gratitude

## MAKING GRATITUDE A YEAR-ROUND ACTIVITY



Gratitude will thrive when it's not just done as part of discrete programs or at certain times of the year but is connected to other, year-round efforts to foster a positive, caring culture.

# Building a Culture of Gratitude

## BUILDING A RESILIENCE TOOLKIT



Mindfulness techniques, training caregivers in the art of compassion, and engaging in campaigns to encourage kindness are all practices that, together with gratitude, offer an array of tools that staff can use.

Want to  
Practice More  
Gratitude?

TRY THESE!

Find more at:

- [ggia.berkeley.edu](http://ggia.berkeley.edu)



CASUAL   
Frequency: 1x/week | Duration: 10 mins

### Gratitude Journal

Count your blessings and enjoy better health and happiness.



MODERATE   
Frequency: Variable | Duration: 30 mins

### Gratitude Letter

Write a letter expressing thanks, and deliver it in person.



CASUAL   
Frequency: 1x/day | Duration: 10 mins

### Gratitude Meditation

Feel grateful as you reflect on all the gifts in your life.

# Want to Practice More Gratitude?

## TRY THIS!

Register at:

- [Thnx4.org](https://Thnx4.org)

### How it works:

- Register for a 10-Day Intensive or 21-Day Gratitude Challenge
- Receive a friendly, informative ping from Thnx4 daily or every other day inviting you to journal and share your gratitude and rate your day-to-day feelings.
- Throughout the challenge, your Thnx4 Insights page shows you how you typically use gratitude and the overall impact of your Gratitude Challenge.
- Enjoy the benefits of strengthening gratitude with Thnx4.



# Thank You!

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