Another New Beginning

I have never quite figured out why we feel like we have a clean start each January. After all, the problems we were dealing with in December don’t go away. Health problems, financial issues, interpersonal discord—they’re all still there. Maybe after the holiday break we feel rested and more ready to cope with it all? Still, the tradition is absolutely true for me—every new year feels like a new beginning.

And with that new start comes my usual attempt at making New Year’s resolutions, which is then quite promptly followed by my not keeping them. I have a virtual attic full of old resolutions that never saw the light of day. Discarded resolutions include things like learning to play Debussy’s “Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun” on the piano, fitting again into my wedding dress, running a marathon—admittedly rather impossible goals for someone as “mature” as I am!

So, I’ve decided that this year will be different. I am picking 5 goals that I know I can achieve and that will help me be a better oncologist. Drumroll please!

1. I will read a review every month about a potential new therapeutic pathway so that I can better help my patients sort through early-phase trials.
2. For every new drug approved by the FDA, I will thoroughly understand the mechanism of action and potential drug interactions so that I can use the drug properly and safely. (You would think this would be routine, but the FDA is cranking out approvals so fast, I can hardly keep up!)
3. Whenever the opportunities arise, I will advocate for fair drug pricing and adequate coverage of oral cancer drugs for seniors.
4. I will stop saying “yes” to so many opportunities. Burnout and fatigue are real and impair our ability to fully express the compassion we have for patients.
5. I will take the time to understand my biases and do everything possible to minimize disparities in healthcare. In my own practice, this will also mean a more concerted effort to understand insecurities my patients may experience with regard to housing, food, and finances.

I invite you to build your own list of resolutions. We are emerging from (and I really believe it is ending) one of the darkest times the medical world has ever faced. And if it was hard for us, just think how much more difficult it has been for patients with cancer. I can’t even wrap my mind around it. Therefore, this is a great time to take stock of the good things that have evolved, like telemedicine, and to regroup. We are all “works in progress,” and we can all improve.

With that, I wish you and your families the healthiest and happiest New Year ever. And if one of your New Year’s resolutions is to climb Mount Everest, go for it—and send pictures!

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