

Bangor Daily News

Founded in 1889

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TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF WE'RE GOING TO BE ISOLATED FOR A LONG TIME

By all indications, we're going to be spending April physically distant, mostly at home, as the tide of coronavirus washes over Maine and America. The mandate to remain apart could last longer, depending on the illness' progression.

During this month of isolation, it will be important to periodically take stock of your well-being, as well as that of loved ones, neighbors and coworkers.

Keeping apart from other people is essential to slow the spread of coronavirus, but it can also have negative consequences that we all must work hard to minimize or overcome.

"Actual and perceived social isolation are both associated with increased risk for early mortality," psychology researchers wrote in a 2015 paper. They found that adults with heart disease were more than twice as likely to die from a cardiac event if they were socially isolated.

We may not be able to visit with family members and friends for weeks, but we can stay connected. Use video services, such as Zoom and FaceTime, to connect. Phone calls, texts and emails also help maintain important connections.

Families are holding virtual birthday parties, car parades and visits through windows to lift spirits and maintain connections.

Exercise is also important for maintaining physical and mental health. Research has shown that being outside is beneficial to our physical and mental wellbeing. It also gives us a needed break from the electronic devices that keep us connected and able to work, but can also take us away from personal engagement.

So, go for a walk, run or bike ride, preferably in your neighborhood. It is great that so many Mainers want to get outside and enjoy the state's many public parks and lands. But too many of these places have been overrun with people, making it hard to maintain physical distancing. The state has closed several parks that were crowded and towns and land trusts have also shuttered overused beaches and public lands. Bangor has closed city playgrounds at parks and schools.

You can also exercise at home using workouts that are posted online. Yoga is a great way to clear your mind and build strength.

We know it is hard when we need to minimize trips to the gro-

cery store and restaurants have appropriately switched to take out and delivery, but eating healthy remains important. Although we often crave comfort foods, which are typically high in fat and sugar, when we are stressed, these types of food can actually depress our mood — as well as add to our waistline. Try to eat fruits, vegetables and lean meats. And maintain your regular meal and sleep schedule.

While social interactions are essential for our good health, spending time alone is necessary too, especially as many of us are sharing limited space with the same people, day after day.

"[E]ngaging in solitude affords an opportunity for self-reflection regarding problems and decision-making. It can also promote self-healing and its maintenance," psychologists Shoba Sreenivasan and Linda E. Weinberger wrote in a 2018 Psychology Today blog post.

In these uncertain and unpredictable times, it is also imperative to keep an eye out for signs that you or someone you know needs help coping with the stress and anxiety that comes with coronavirus and the precautions taken to slow its spread.

If you or someone you're concerned about is lashing out, having trouble sleeping, isolating themselves or increasing substance use, professional help may be needed.

Behavioral health providers in Maine remain available via telemedicine, meaning you don't have to go to an office to meet with a provider or to get medication. An emergency bill, approved by lawmakers in March, allows MaineCare to reimburse providers for virtual case management services.

In addition, many resources are available online and by phone.

A national disaster distress hotline is available 24 hours a day by calling 1-800-985-5990 or texting TalkWithUs to 66746. You will be connected with a trained crisis counselor.

There is some evidence that Maine is flattening the curve as people here follow physical distancing restrictions. However, coronavirus is still prevalent in the state and the restrictions need to remain in place. Taking care of yourself and checking on friends, neighbors and relatives will help us get through this pandemic.

OTHER VOICES

SMALL BUSINESSES INNOVATING TO SURVIVE

As the coronavirus public health crisis continues to spread, it's also creating an economic crisis that will impact the world. Last week, Congress approved a stimulus package that will provide some much-needed help for American businesses. But a government check won't be enough. Now is the time for businesses great and small to think creatively about how to adjust to a fluid market and keep the economy moving.

Last week, a few Texas examples from Bryan and College Station gave us hope. ...

David Fox, owner of the Blue Baker, has created a new product he calls "baker bonds" which are gift cards with a twist: Customers can redeem any unused balance on a card with "interest," which Fox will pay in the form of cookies.

Across town in Bryan, Fargo's Pit BBQ is installing a drive-thru window and opening an online store to sell its barbecue sauce.

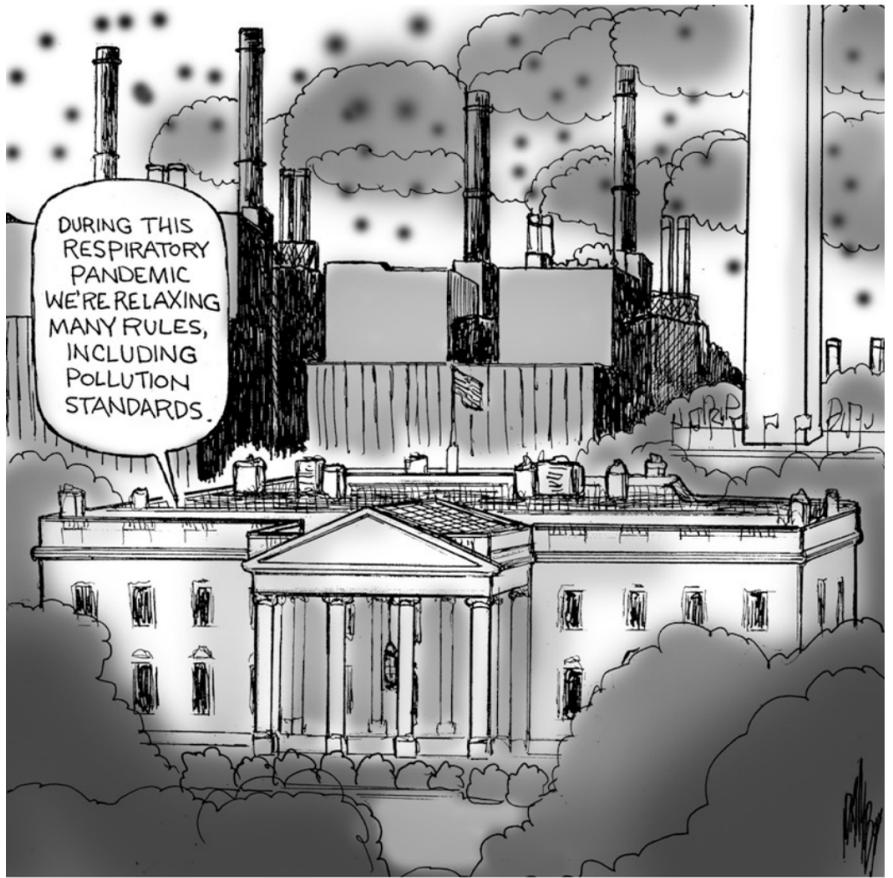
Closer to home, and closer to

the crisis, Unique Software Development in Dallas and Leather Sofa Co. in Lewisville, Texas, have shifted operations to making medical supplies.

None of this is ideal. Bakers open bakeries because they're good at baking, not at creative financing. What's more, adjustments like these won't save all businesses. At best, they might stem the tide. But if Fargo's Pit BBQ can spin up an online store shipping to stay-at-home pit bosses across the nation, that might slow the company's descent while we wait for the crisis to abate and the economy to rebound.

This isn't a time for businesses to flout the recommendations of public health experts to shelter in place. But it's also not the time for entrepreneurs to sit on their haunches and wait for a government bailout. Instead, small businesses should make what creative adjustments they can in crisis, to find ways to work behind a keyboard instead of behind a counter, and to keep companies solvent.

Dallas Morning News (April 1)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Price of incompetence

Last week, the federal government mailed oversize postcards to thousands of folks in Maine and millions across the country. The face of each postcard reads: President Trump's Coronavirus guidelines for America. Get real.

Until recently, Donald Trump was the epidemic's denier-in-chief. He claimed that the "Chinese virus" would miraculously disappear. Trump is responsible for the government's delayed and anemic response to pandemic. As a result, hundreds in Maine and many thousands across the nation will likely die.

Adding insult to injury, the postcard demonstrates to me that the president is now using a health emergency to promote his own reelection. And who pays for Trump's postcard promotion? The taxpayers — you and me.

But that cost is nothing compared to the cost of incompetence in the White House.

David Chase
York

Who is essential?

I find it ugly that in this health crisis the U.S. government considers many undocumented immigrants essential workers, but will resume aggressive deportations as soon as the crisis passes.

It is said that moments of crisis show our true character. It is time to show that we have moved beyond the mass extermination of Native Americans and the horrors of slavery, to recognize that the core of our immigration problem is that we are unwilling to recognize that we want and need these workers here.

The U.S. government has now deemed them essential. We must now create a system that recognizes their essential contribution to our lives.

Rick Osann
Bar Harbor

Clarity about lab jobs

I find this an opportune but unfortunate time to bring to the forefront our profession — that being the medical laboratory profession — and also to clarify some things that are sometimes misunderstood.

Most people do not know who we are or what we do, but let me start with the clarification that the mobile "testing centers" for the coronavirus are not where the tests are performed. Those are specimen collection centers only. The actual

WRITE TO US

Letters must be 200 words or fewer and include a full name, town of residence and daytime phone number. OpEds may be 650 words. Letters may be edited or rejected for clarity, taste, libel and space. If an OpEd is published, submissions by the same writer will not be considered for 60 days.

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testing is done in a clinical laboratory by clinical or medical laboratory professionals. We have college degrees and have studied topics such as clinical chemistry, molecular virology and microbiology, immunohematology, thrombotic evaluation, flow cytometry, pharmacogenomics, mycology, parasitology, etc.

When a patient specimen comes into the clinical laboratory, we do not just push a button and an answer comes out. We do use and maintain sophisticated analyzers, but we also do complex manual testing requiring years of scientific study to get test interpretations right, such as differentiating the cells that determine if a patient's leukemia is lymphocytic or myelocytic or telling plasmodium falciparum from babesia microti. A patient's treatment is based on accurate identification of these cells and microorganisms.

If a test takes hours or days or weeks to perform, that is how long it takes. Needs are not being ignored; laboratory professionals are working diligently to get the testing completed. The laboratory receives specimens from all over the hospital, its clinics, nursing homes, and from individual physician offices. Your specimens are given the fullest attention. To us, you are not just a swab or venipuncture — you are our patient!

We love science and want to serve the scientific needs of our patients however they enter the health care system. You don't have to think of us often, but we hope you know we are there trying to help you along with the other healthcare workers.

Julie Brownie
Retired medical laboratory scientist
Stetson

Learn from this crisis

We can build a multi-billion dollar nuclear powered aircraft carrier, which can have enough firepower on board to destroy half the planet in one day, but we cannot provide enough "personal protective equipment" to protect our

healthcare workers from a contagion that can kill thousands of our citizens, or enough ventilators to save their lives when they get ill.

After having worked in engineering and health care, I have seen this coming for many years and tried repeatedly to warn our elected officials of the coming catastrophe. They were only interested in political bickering. And now what is their response? Throw money at it and repeat the same stupid political platitudes and slogans and economic gibberish that got us here in the first place. Can you begin to see my point?

We keep hearing from the government how fast we will return to "normal" after this is over. There will be no normal after this. And if we try to go back to the same old "normal" then we are doomed to repeat another world catastrophe.

What credibility our government has at the moment will perish along with many of our fellow citizens who will succumb to this disease. It didn't have to be this way. It could have been prevented. It could have been contained. But political self-interest and corporate greed got in the way.

Every country has a piece of this responsibility and everyone of us has a responsibility to see it does not happen again. We must learn from it.

Lawrence Everett
West Paris

Support gov. workers

Like many Mainers, I am often frustrated by inefficiency and waste in the federal government. But over the last three years I have felt uneasy as President Trump has mocked and disparaged our hard-working civil servants. It has been doubly disappointing to watch the Republican Party join him in their fevered call to "drain the swamp."

Our government scientists, health professionals and, yes, even bureaucrats work hard to protect our nation's health and safety. If that wasn't obvious before, the coronavirus pandemic has brutally reminded us. It was a hugely costly mistake for the Trump Administration to disband the National Security Council's Directorate for Global Health Security and Biodefense, and wrong to propose budget cuts for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institutes of Health.

In November, I plan to vote for candidates who applaud and support the important work that federal, state and local officials do on behalf of all of us.

Nathaniel Wheelwright
Harpswell

DOONESBURY



GARRY TRUDEAU

LAURA FORTMAN

Working overtime to help jobless Mainers

The novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, has caused unprecedented economic hardship for Maine people, including thousands who need unemployment support to weather this storm.

In Maine, for the week ending March 21, there were 21,500 new unemployment insurance claims filed compared with 630 claims the previous week — a 3,400 percent increase in just one week. On Monday, March 30, we had over 250,000 calls to the Maine Department of Labor.

The department is working hard to ensure every person who applies for unemployment benefits gets the money they need to help ease the economic stress caused by this crisis.

Department staff is working overtime, including on weekends, to handle the historically high volume of unemployment insurance claims filed, answer calls from concerned Mainers, and help people reset their passwords through the online live chat feature.

We have tripled the number of people answering calls by hiring new staff, bringing back retirees and reassigning staff from other areas of the department. Our goal is to have 100 additional people answering phones by the end of next week.

Despite the unprecedented volume of calls and claims, I am proud to report that we paid out over \$6 million in benefits during the week of March 23-28.

As the department ramps up its capacity to receive and process claims, we are putting in place a new schedule to help reduce congestion on the unemployment phone lines. Starting Monday, April 6, we are switching to an alphabetical-by-last-name calling schedule. If a caller's last name begins with A-H, we ask that they call on Monday; I-Q call on Tuesday; R-Z call on Wednesday. Thursday and Friday will be left unassigned for those who miss, or were unable to call, on their alphabetical day. Our unemployment phone line — 800-593-7660 — is available between 8 a.m. and 12:15 p.m., Monday-Friday.

The recently enacted federal CARES Act includes new temporary unemployment programs to provide additional relief to people affected by COVID-19. At the direction of Gov. Janet Mills, Maine has opted in to the new federal unemployment programs. The Maine Department of Labor requires guidance from the U.S. Department of Labor in order to implement the new programs. We continue to press for that guidance from the federal department, and once we receive it, we will implement the system changes. Claims filed will be processed retroactively to the dates in the law.

Until then, we urge Maine people who would be eligible under these programs to wait to file until the changes are in place. Filing now will result in a denial of benefits even though those applying, in fact, deserve the benefits. Our department wants every Mainer to receive the benefits for which they are eligible during this difficult time. We will post information as we receive it on our social media and website, and encourage all to check there for updates.

The quickest way for Mainers to get unemployment benefits in the meantime is to apply online with a computer. To avoid errors, all filers should review the guide online that explains how to create an account on Maine's unemployment insurance system, ReEmployME. We'd like to make sure those who need specialized assistance can get through on the phones. And, when you call, please don't hang up; remain on the line as we work to answer your call.

We understand the frustration and anxiety Maine people are feeling during this challenging time and as we adapt our unemployment insurance system to handle the changing needs. We are all in this together, and the Maine Department of Labor will continue to do everything we can to support Mainers who need help.

Laura Fortman is the commissioner of the Maine Department of Labor.

In uncertain times, Mainers always come together

BY KARL-HEINZ SPITTLER AND GAVIN DUCKER
SPECIAL TO THE BDN

As health care workers, we are doing what we have been trained to do — what comes instinctively to the many who have heard a calling to care for their fellow human beings. COVID-19 has a lot of unknowns and is still evolving. Those in health care are navigating a delicate balance between being there for our families and answering our call of duty to care for our communities — consciously separating ourselves from our loved ones, as our care of others puts those close to us at higher risk of exposure. While we know it is for the best, it's a tough sacrifice.

However, we are inspired as we work to meet the challenge before all of us. We are inspired by the support of our communities, the courage of our patients, and the dedication of the care team we work with every day. For many of us, the hours have been long as we care for our patients and plan for the many challenges still to come, but through the difficulty we remain hopeful.

We are hopeful because we are in this together.

As Northern Light Health, we are more than 12,000 dedicated individuals who rally together to combat this insidious, invisible virus. Every day, new circumstances arise and priorities shift, but we adapt, using evidence-based data and science as our guiding principle to try to predict what may lay right around the corner. Between patient visits, we stand together united on multiple calls a day, starting at dawn and lasting well into the evening hours to plan for the days ahead. This planning has asked of us to push the traditional boundaries of health care.

While we continue to care for each patient with compassion, the response to this pandemic calls us to develop new protocols and provide that care in new, innovative ways. It also asks us to think differently about how we use our supplies and designate our response teams. There is a learning curve, but we thank each of our Northern Light Health colleagues in Maine, as each new advance we develop brings us closer to conquering this unprecedented public health crisis.

People in our communities also continuously feed our hope and optimism and keep us going. Mainers have rolled up their sleeves and rallied together in support of each other and for all of us in health care. Whether it's a homemade sign of encouragement, the donation of personal protective equipment, or the offering of therapeutic socks for teams spending long hours on the floor, we are so appreciative of the hundreds of community members who have reached out.

Thank you. We appreciate you recognizing us and letting us know our efforts are worthwhile.



OP ART BY GEORGE DANBY

We are hopeful and inspired, but the fight is not done. We know you are also weary and anxious. We hear your concern and understand your frustration — but we urge you to remain vigilant. There will be a temptation to drop in and visit with a close friend or share coffee with a neighbor. And, while we all want to do these things that were once part of our daily lives, we ask that you continue to do those things at a safe distance. Your decision to not visit a vulnerable loved one could save their life. We understand the sacrifice, but the more we all do what is necessary now, the sooner we will be back to our routines that we so dearly miss. We want that for you, and we want that for all of us in health care who are trying to remain steadfast so that we may be there for you when you need us most.

You also may be confused by mixed

messages that may be circulating on social media or other forums. This can be scary, but remember to seek guidance from credible sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organization, and your own providers. We're here to help. Don't be led astray by the not-so-helpful rumor mill.

And, finally, don't give up. We speak for so many of us in health care when we say have hope, stay strong, and remain vigilant. Together, we will get through this.

Karl-Heinz Spittler is chief of anesthesiology at Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center. Gavin Ducker is a family physician, senior physician executive and vice president of medical affairs at Northern Light Inland Hospital. They are co-presidents of the Northern Light Medical Group.

Coronavirus turns economic theory into action

There is a scene in the movie "Independence Day" when President Whitmore and senior leaders take refuge in Area 51. They meet the wild-eyed Dr. Brackish Okun, who had spent years studying the aliens' technology.

Okun was enthused; the arrival of extraterrestrials turned the crashed spaceship "on." Caught up in the excitement of the science, Okun exclaimed with glee that "the last 24 hours have been really exciting!"

The (fictional) president lost it. "People are dying out there. I don't think 'exciting' is the word I'd choose to describe it!"

That is a rough analogy for the economic aspects of the COVID-19 outbreak. While real-world economists are a bit more empathetic than Dr. Okun, practitioners of the dismal science are intellectually engrossed in the situation.

The United States' economy is almost certainly in a recession. However, the question of "why" presents the "exciting" answer.

Is it because a tower of exotic financial instruments, built atop a mountain of ill-advised

and unsustainable debt, collapsed? No.

Is it because of irrational exuberance arising from the future promise of technology and the advent of the "end of history"? Nah.

Is it because the price of oil unexpectedly spiked due to the rise of Islamic radicalism in the Mideast? Nope.

Instead, we are in the midst of something never before seen. We have intentionally caused a recession by hitting the big, red, metaphoric "STOP" button on our economic machinery.

Over the past several weeks, "social distancing" has turned into "gathering restrictions," and then on to "stay (healthy) at home" orders. Economies of all stripes are built upon the exchange of goods and services. In many cases, those exchanges occur in the physical world.

So when a microscopic virus threatens to spread far more rapidly than our physical health infrastructure can manage, we have to do something. This time around, we hit the emergency shutoff on the economy.

Like other equipment, shutting things down means production stops. Yet time doesn't. And the latter is a resource we can never get back.

People are understandably worried. It is an unsettled time, and economic demands continue even while the economy it-

self doesn't. Rents and mortgages still need to be paid; your place of residence still needs to be maintained, which requires material and labor, both of which cost money.

We all still need to pay excise taxes on and register our cars and trucks when the emergency is over, not to mention pay now for all the other costs of life; diapers, food, water, etc. Modern communications, whether phone or internet, keep us connected when distant, but aren't free. It all adds up.

Businesses feel those same pressures. If they — restaurants, retailers, bed-and-breakfasts — cannot sell their goods and services, then they have no way to pay their costs that continue while the economy is closed.

Which makes people worry more, because those businesses are their employers. And if their employers don't have jobs, then the end of the pandemic is far from the end of the problem.

That brings us back to our excited economists. Congress has enacted numerous programs to help people bear those costs while the economy is stopped. Expanded unemployment benefits, paid leave, paycheck protection loans; they are designed to meet basic needs and maintain some semblance of normal income during the "stay home" period.

But wait, there's more. Con-

gress also passed a "stimulus" program, giving many American homes north of \$3,000; \$1,200 each for an adult, \$500 each per child. Economists call this "helicopter money." It is "extra" beyond existing programs and is intended to reinvigorate consumer demand when the situation returns to normal-ish.

We'll see if it works. Economists theorize that, when the "all clear" sounds, people will spend this dividend. If they do, it will act as a pull cord on an old two-stroke, restarting the economy. Getting it back into gear will bring with it jobs, tax revenue, investment and the like.

But if people are too spooked by the COVID-19 situation and instead squirrel the dividend away? Well, then the best guess is that everyone will have a bit more in their nest as we settle into a much longer recession.

Just as we defeated the invaders in "Independence Day," we will beat COVID-19. The only question remaining is how quickly the economy will bounce back. "Exciting" isn't the right word for this situation, but we will get a real good look at economic theory in action.

Michael Cianchette is a Navy reservist who served in Afghanistan and in-house counsel to a number of businesses in southern Maine. He was a chief counsel to former Gov. Paul LePage.