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Time to 'Buddy Up' – Simple Strategies to Support Oncologists During the Covid-19 Pandemic --Manuscript Draft--

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Abstract:	We propose simple strategies for oncologists to deal with this unprecedented, anxiety provoking time. We recommend a novel 'Buddy Up' system where we come together as a community to provide much needed support in an effective way. There are numerous publications detailing Covid-19 outcomes and the negative impact on health care workers physically and psychologically, we provide much needed tools to enhance resilience in oncologists during this extra-ordinary time.

Time to 'Buddy Up' – Simple Strategies to Support Oncologists During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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1 Covid-19 has caused a sudden shift in the approach to patient management and treatment decision making.
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4 Doctors' resilience is tested daily and at a magnitude higher than ever before. Multiple risk factors for burnout
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6 within the oncology community have been identified [1, 2]. Today these risks are even higher.
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10 Many of the stressors due to the Covid-19 pandemic are related to the services that we rely on to provide patient
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12 care. Covid-19 has radically altered conversations regarding availability and goals of cancer care, and data from
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14 China[3] have shown that cancer patients face higher risks of Covid-19 infection and have poorer outcomes than
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16 those without cancer. We, as physicians, adapt as best we know how, working tirelessly as strong multi-
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18 disciplinary groups to ensure that despite these extraordinary times, we continue to put our patients' needs
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20 first. National and international cancer societies have created "pandemic cancer treatment guidelines"[4],[5] to
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22 provide guidance to optimize care within the current environment of scarce resources.
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28 During this time, oncologists need to develop mechanisms to tackle the ever present but significantly worsened
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30 risk of physician burnout (1). To face this challenge, a group of oncologists at our centre came together,
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32 acknowledging that each sub-speciality and every physician may have their own specific needs, to develop a
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34 number of fundamental resources.
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39 Firstly, we developed a novel system for connected physical distancing called 'Buddy Up'. Hobfoll et al[6]
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41 described five empirically supported intervention principles to guide and inform intervention efforts in the
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43 presence of early and mid-term mass trauma: a sense of safety; calming; a sense of self and community efficacy;
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45 connectedness; and hope. Based on these principles, the primary goal of 'Buddy Up' is to alleviate Covid-19
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47 pandemic-related stress by recognising the importance of being connected and building a community to ground
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49 our stress and strengthen resilience. Our system asks oncologists to group together in twos or threes for daily
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51 check-ins, monitoring each other for stress that may become distress via phone call, email or text message.
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53 Messages may be words, phrases or simply an emoji in response to simple questions such as 'How are you
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55 feeling?', 'Are you sleeping, eating, exercising?'.
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1 Secondly, based on the themes of self and community efficacy and the aim to bring groups together, a simple
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3 ritual of virtual coffee mornings has been implemented, to chat and debrief. Since substantial evidence supports
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5 the benefits of mindfulness and meditation[7], the third strategy entailed virtual meditation lounges, led by
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7 physicians for physicians, allowing for a sense of safety, calm and hope. Finally, recognizing that one size does
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9 not fit all and that options are essential, a list of virtual links to activities such as yoga, Pilates, exercise, art
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11 galleries and music was created.
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17 The aim of these simple strategies is to recognize that by working together we can support each other in
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19 effective ways. Many of us presume that our colleagues are doing 'okay', but throughout this unprecedented
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21 global event we must consciously 'Buddy Up', to ensure that no one is left behind.
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