

A large, multi-story brick building with a fountain in the foreground and a blue sky with clouds. The building is the main focus, with a fountain on the left and a body of water in the foreground. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

# NM COVID-19 DAY 1130 Reflections: Three + Years into the Pandemic

David R. Scrase, M.D., M.H.S.A.  
APIC Conference, April 14, 2023  
Sandia Pueblo, New Mexico

# Agenda

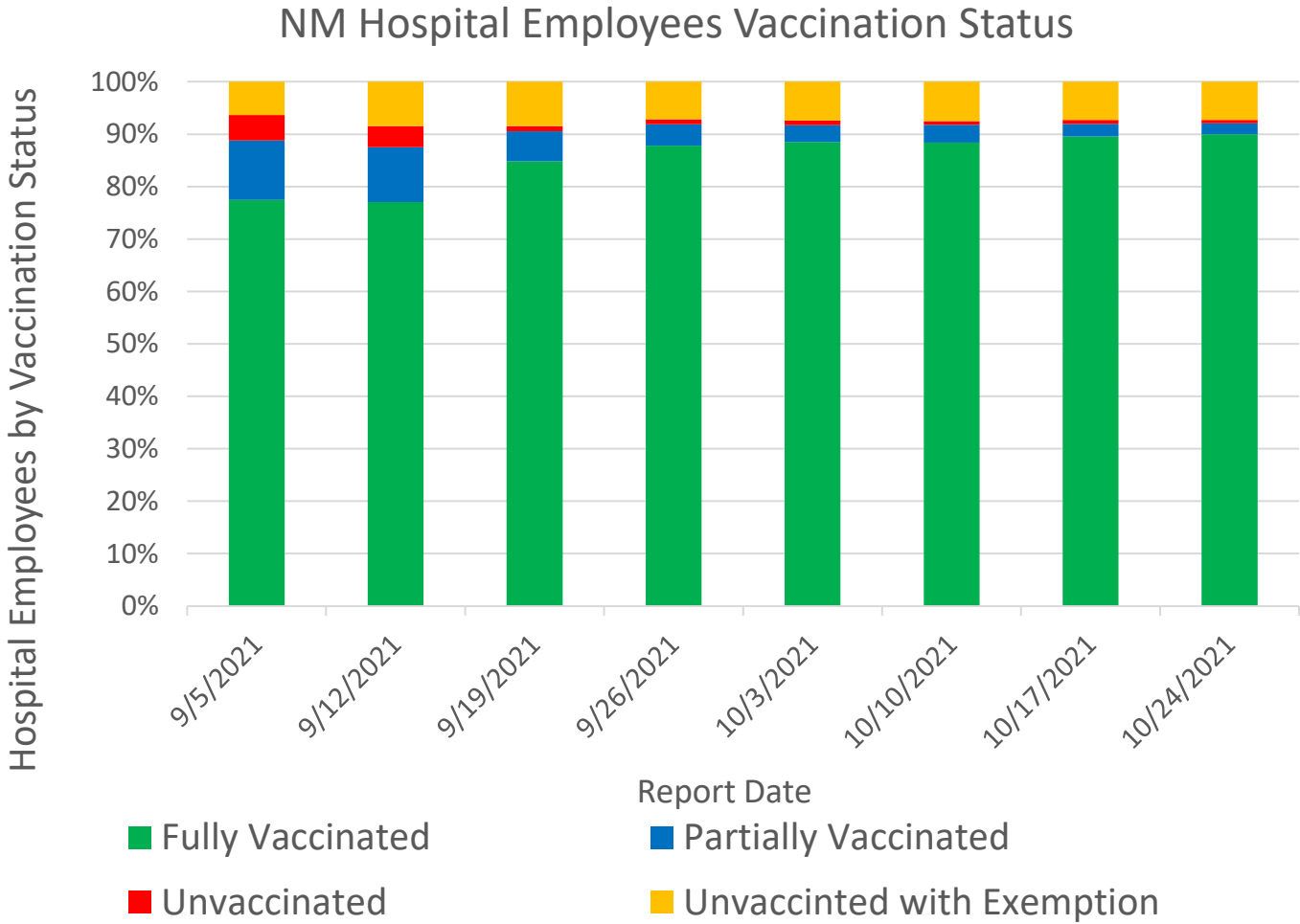
- Thank YOU!
- A bit about all of you and your pandemic experience
- “Top 12 Things I Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic”
- Managing Stress as a Health Care Professional (with or without an insane pandemic to deal with)
- Paths and Strategies to Find Balance in our Lives
- Thank you again!



# NM hospital employee vaccination rates

As of October 24, 2021:

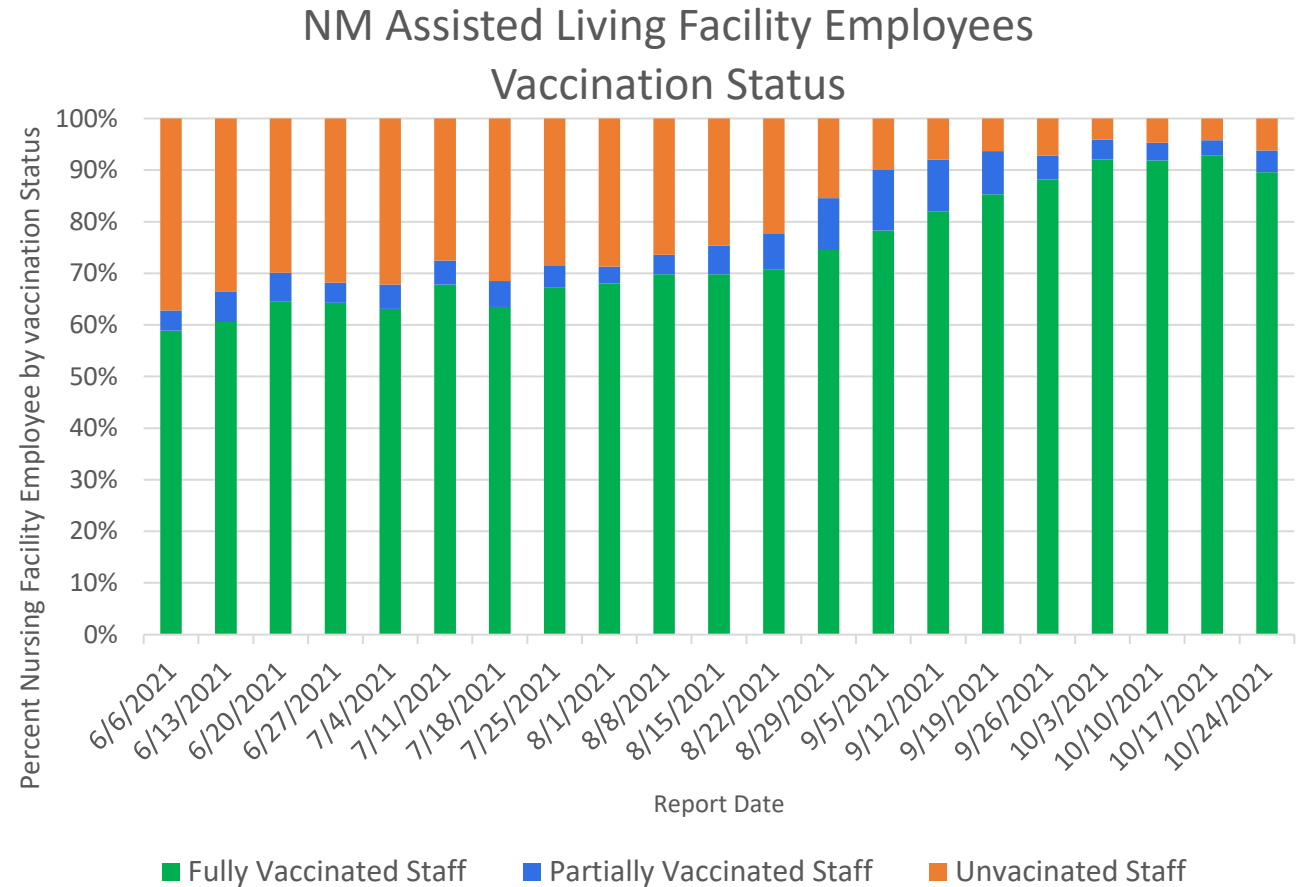
- 90.0% of New Mexico's **hospital employees** are fully vaccinated
- 2.1% are partially vaccinated
- 7.3% have an approved exemption
- 0.6% remain unvaccinated



# NM nursing facility employee vaccination rates

As of October 24, 2021:

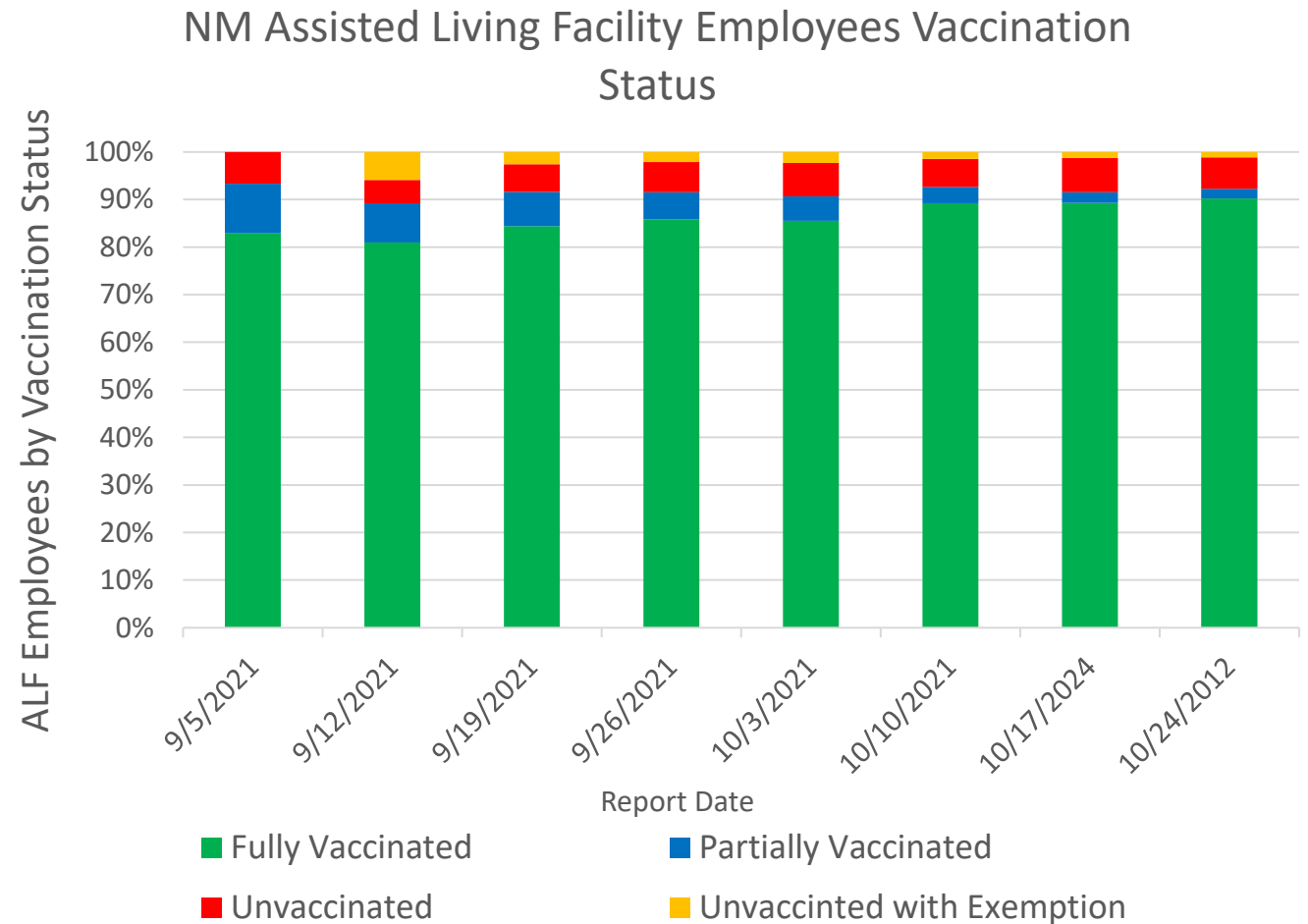
- 89.6% of New Mexico's **nursing facility employees** are fully vaccinated
- 4.2% are partially vaccinated
- 6.2% remain unvaccinated



# NM assisted living facility employee vaccination rates

As of October 24, 2021:

- 90.2% of New Mexico's **assisted living facility employees** are fully vaccinated
- 2.1% are partially vaccinated
- 1.2% have an approved exemption
- 6.6% remain unvaccinated



# Where do you work?

- In an INPATIENT setting hospital or health system?
- In a nursing home?
- In an outpatient setting?
- As an independent consultant?
- Other?

What was the most difficult aspect of *infection control management* during the pandemic?



What has been the most difficult *personal* challenge for you during the pandemic?

“Top 12 Things I Learned from  
the COVID-19 Pandemic”

## 12. Everyone is worthy of respect (even mean people)

- Many Americans have moved away from making decisions based on analyzing the data themselves to relying on chosen authority figures (who may or may not use data)
- Anger and frustration are often motivated by fear



*“Honey, come look! I’ve found some information all the world’s top scientists and doctors missed.”*

# 11. Huge and insolvable problems can be best approached by breaking them into smaller, solvable problems

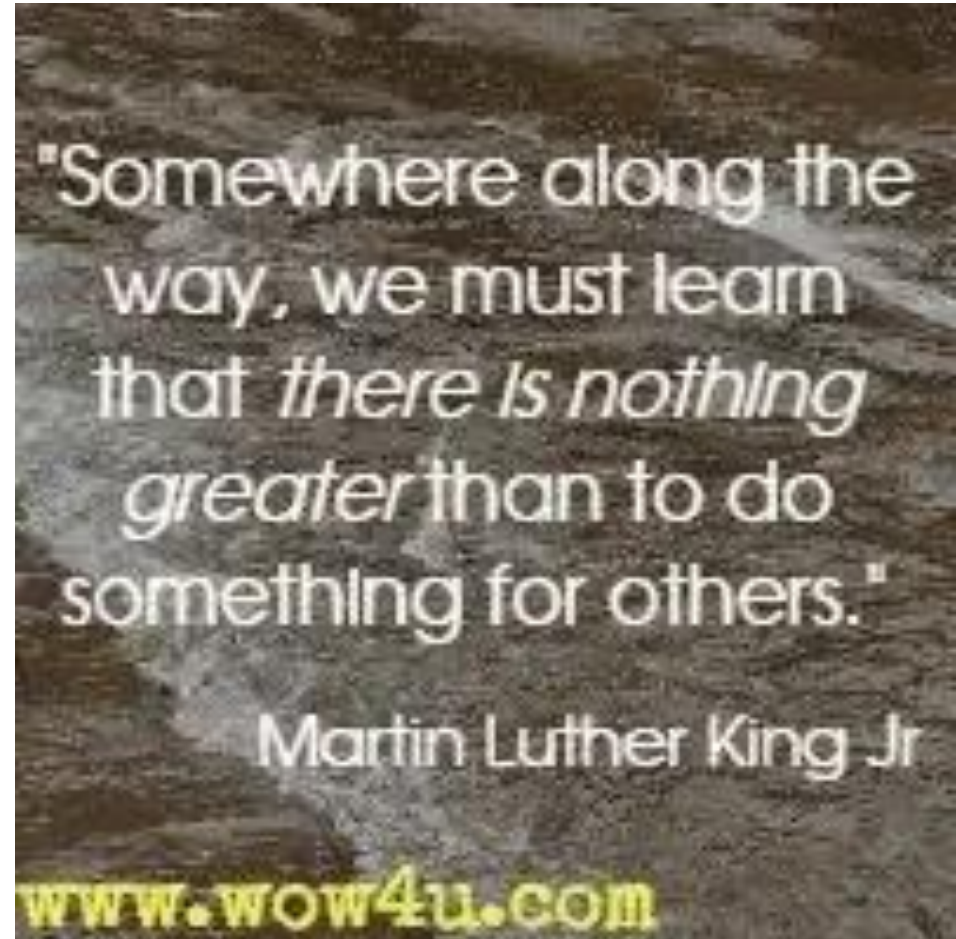
- NM has the highest SVI (social vulnerability index) in the United States
- Major initial challenges involved the lack of food, water, and places for infected individuals to isolate
- The ESF (Emergency Functions Model) and established command structures supported this approach

“Calculus succeeds by breaking complicated problems down into simpler parts. That strategy, of course, is not unique to calculus. All good problem-solvers know that hard problems become easier when they’re split into chunks. The truly radical and distinctive move of calculus is that it takes this divide-and-conquer strategy to its utmost extreme — all the way out to infinity.”

— Steven H. Strogatz, [Infinite Powers: The Story of Calculus - The Most Important Discovery in Mathematics](#)

# 10. NEVER underestimate how much help you need and people's willingness to provide it

- The only way to manage an overwhelming challenge with insufficient resources is with an equally overwhelming amount of support
- No one ever said "No"
- Role of the healthcare system



# 9. Science can be politicized (who knew?)

- Is politicizing science is the same as destroying it?
- Why did this happen?
- Did our messaging fuel the fire?
- How to we address this going forward.

Auschwitz exists because of  
politicized science.

— *Michael Crichton* —

AZ QUOTES

# 8. Reliable data is critical

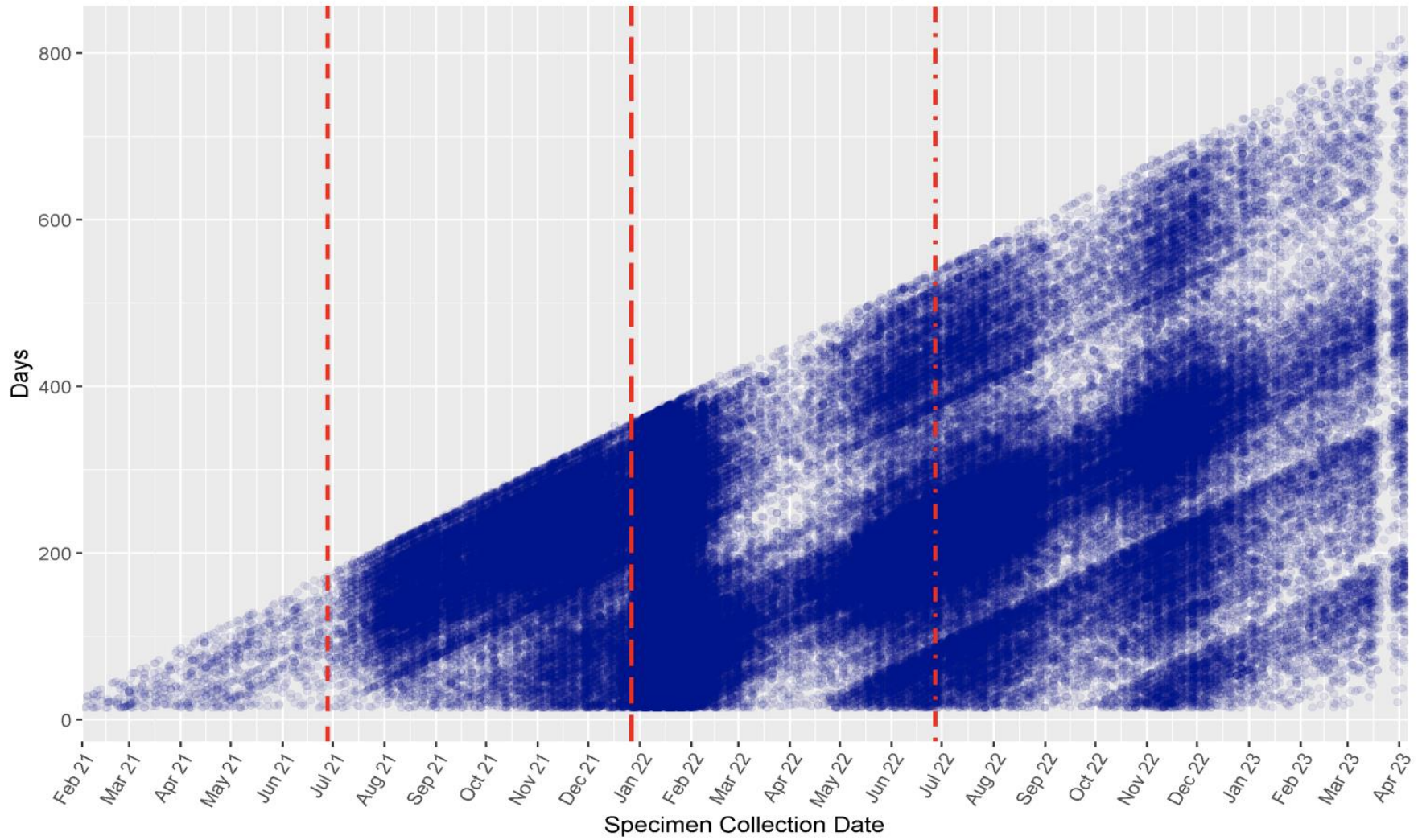
- The plural of anecdote is not data
- (Sometimes it is legislation, though)
- NM led the nation in our capacity to produce, analyze and use real time data
- <https://cv.nmhealth.org/epidemiology-reports/>

After April 11, 2023, the COVID-19 bi-weekly reports below will be published monthly, on every third Tuesday of the month.

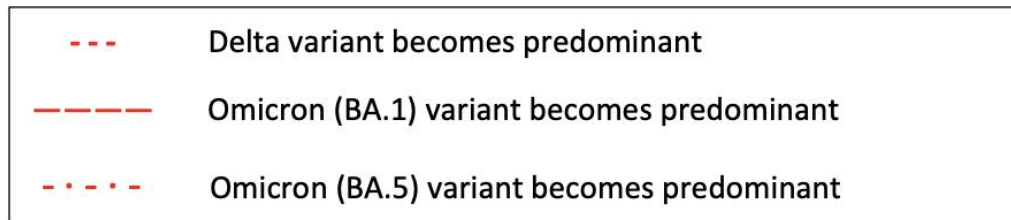
<b>Case Reports</b>	<b>Hospitalization Reports</b>
<a href="#">DOWNLOAD THE LATEST COVID-19 GEOGRAPHIC TRENDS REPORT</a>	<a href="#">DOWNLOAD THE LATEST COVID-19 HOSPITALIZATION REPORT</a>
<a href="#">DOWNLOAD THE LATEST COVID-19 DEMOGRAPHICS REPORT</a>	<b>Mortality Reports</b>
<a href="#">DOWNLOAD THE LATEST COVID-19 HEALTH AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS REPORT</a>	<a href="#">DOWNLOAD THE LATEST COVID-19 MORTALITY REPORT</a>
<b>Variant of Concern Reports</b>	<b>Pediatric Case Reports</b>
<a href="#">DOWNLOAD THE LATEST COVID-19 VOC REPORT</a>	<a href="#">DOWNLOAD THE LATEST COVID-19 PEDIATRIC CASE REPORT</a>
<b>Vaccination Reports</b>	<b>Wastewater Surveillance</b>
<a href="#">DOWNLOAD THE VACCINATION REPORT</a>	<a href="#">DOWNLOAD THE LATEST WASTEWATER SURVEILLANCE REPORT</a>
<b>Community Transmission for Healthcare Facilities</b>	The Wastewater Monitoring report will be updated once current data becomes available.
<a href="#">DOWNLOAD THE COVID-19 COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION REPORT</a>	

Reports from 04/11/2023

# Days Between Most Recent Vaccination Dose and Specimen Collection Date



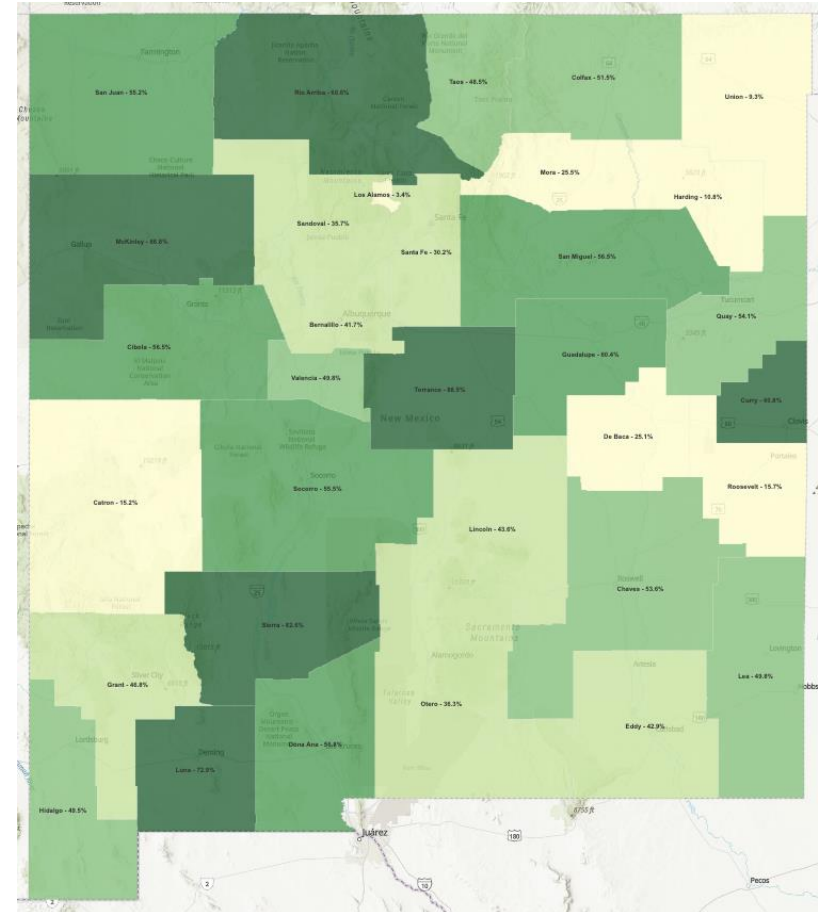
Median: 206 days



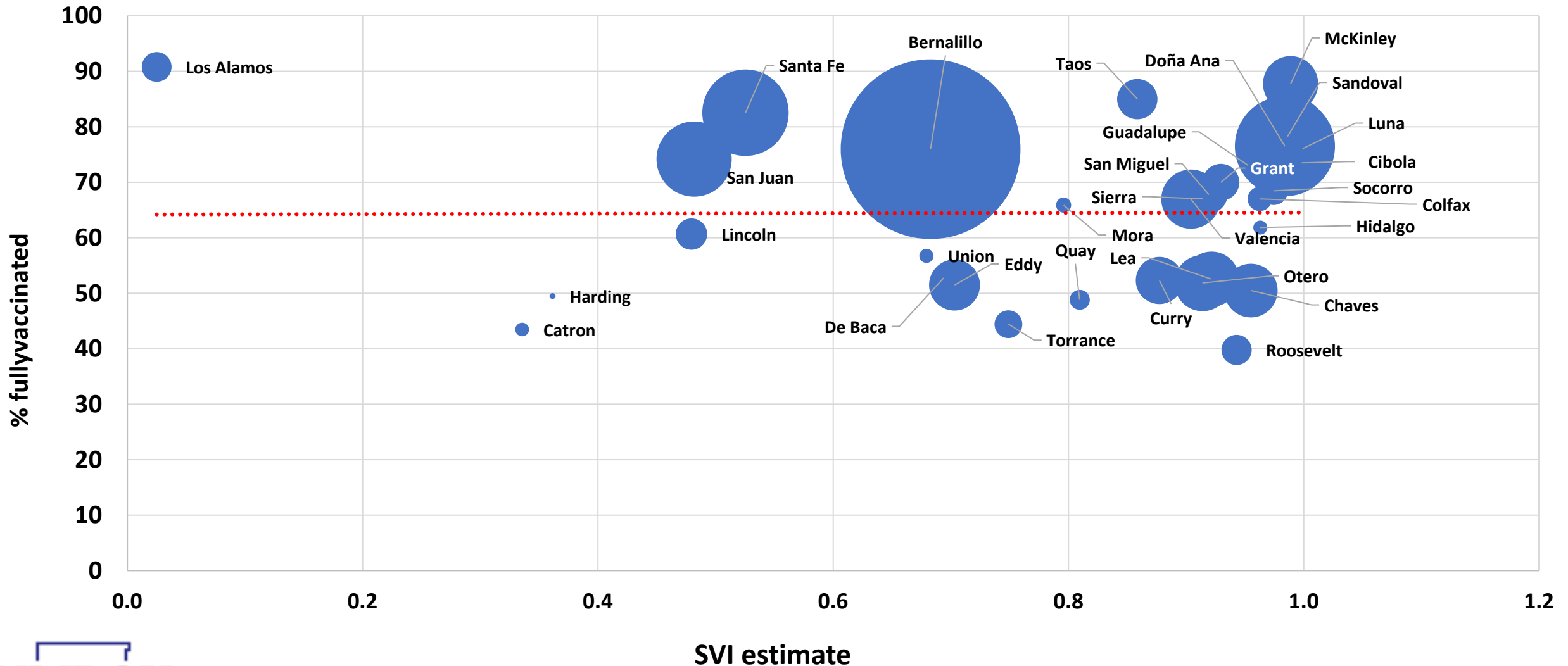


# 7. Poverty is the fundamental root cause of most of NM's (pandemic-related) challenges

- Today, what percent of New Mexicans receive some form of support (money for food, utilities, health care) from the Human Services Department?



# NM continues to vaccinate our most vulnerable counties



Data sources: NMSIIS and Tiberius; vaccination data as of 11/01/2021.  
County population denominators are for those 18 years and older.

## 6. Relationships sustain us

- Working from home was fantastic, but I didn't realize how much I missed people until I got back
- I would not have survived the pandemic without so many supportive relationships



*"I can't wait to forget everything I learned about myself during quarantine."*

# 5. Multiple high-functioning teams saved New Mexico

- Multiple leadership and clinical teams in government, UNM, private sector healthcare organizations
- Medical Advisory Team had as many as 175 members at its peak
- Keeping the work coordinated *between* teams was a significant challenge

Survey results reveal when employees feel connected to their teams,

**55%**  
**increase**  
in engagement  
and an



**83%**  
**increase**  
in the incidence of  
great work.

## 4. New Mexico must make substantial investments in all aspects of our healthcare Delivery Systems

- NM ranks in bottom 10% of states for per capita general hospital *and* ICU
- Most New Mexico healthcare organizations are experiencing substantial financial losses due to crush of pandemic
- Travelers are the primary driver of increased costs



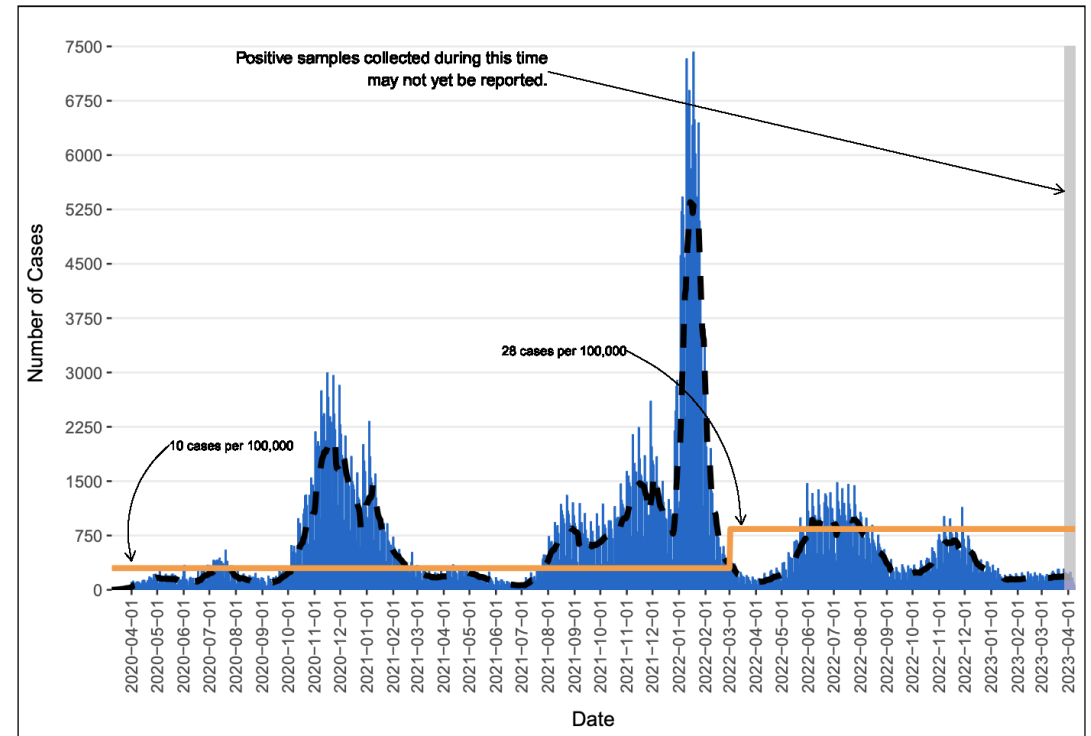
### 3. It is impossible to overcommunicate

- We attempted massive communication efforts:
  - Press Conferences (weekly)
  - Clinician weekly seminars
  - Online publication of all pandemic/vaccination NM data
  - OpEds, daily news releases
- Most organizations implemented and sustained elaborate communication plans
- We did not reach all important audiences



## 2. Our main challenge during COVID-19 is to be more agile than the virus itself

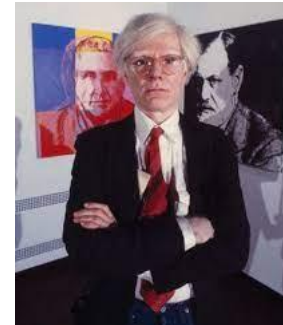
- It is impossible to be agile looking backward at data
- Modeling Team provided 2, 4 and 6 week projections on a *weekly* basis
- Variant tracking and reporting here in NM enabled us to be highly responsive to lineage changes (for over a year before CDC began reporting)
- Effective, quick responses to changing trends is critical



# BONUS Learning: Trust me, 15 minutes is enough

- “In the future, everyone will be world famous for 15 minutes.”

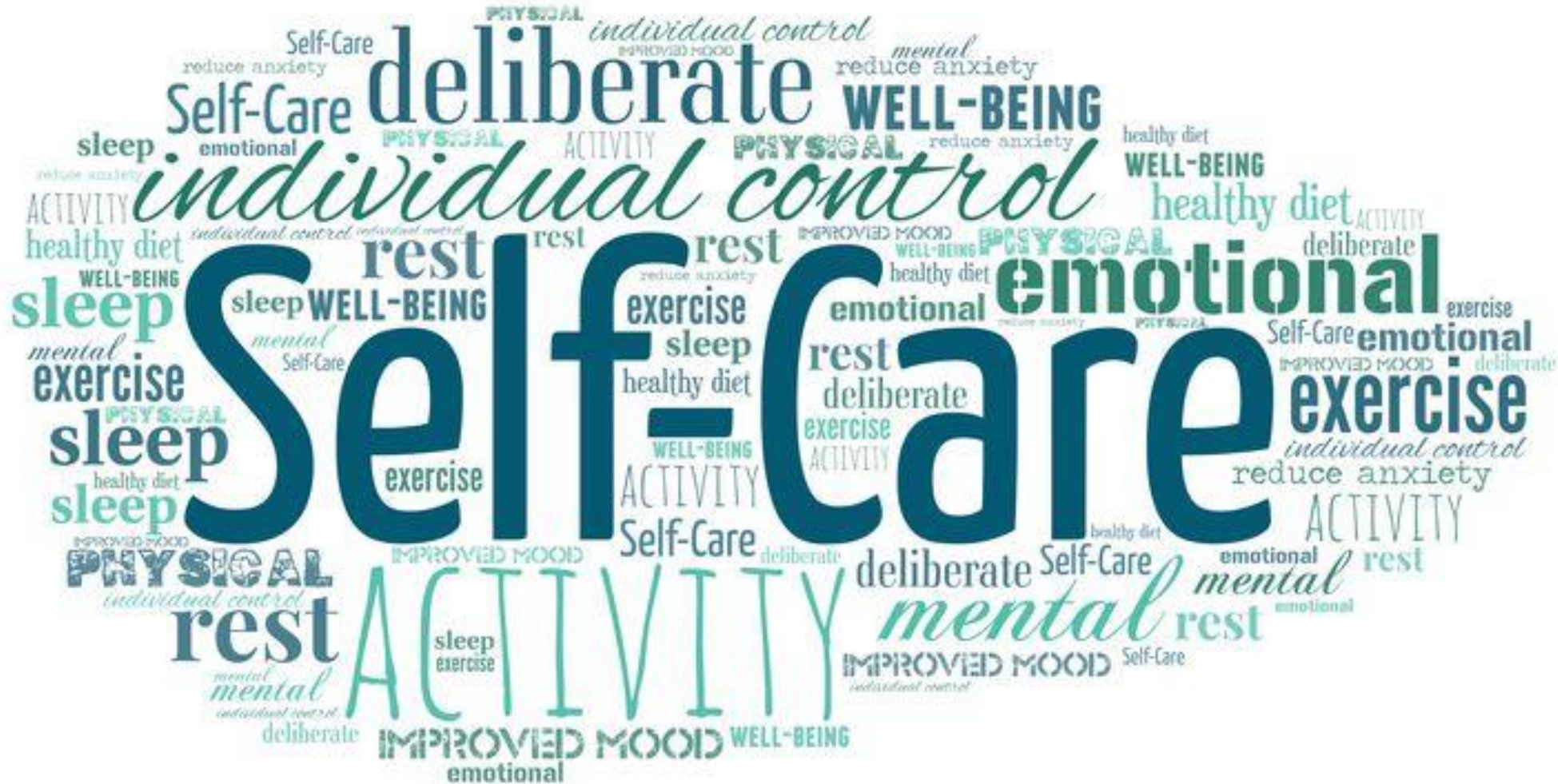
Andy Warhol\*



\*but see here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/15\\_minutes\\_of\\_fame](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/15_minutes_of_fame)

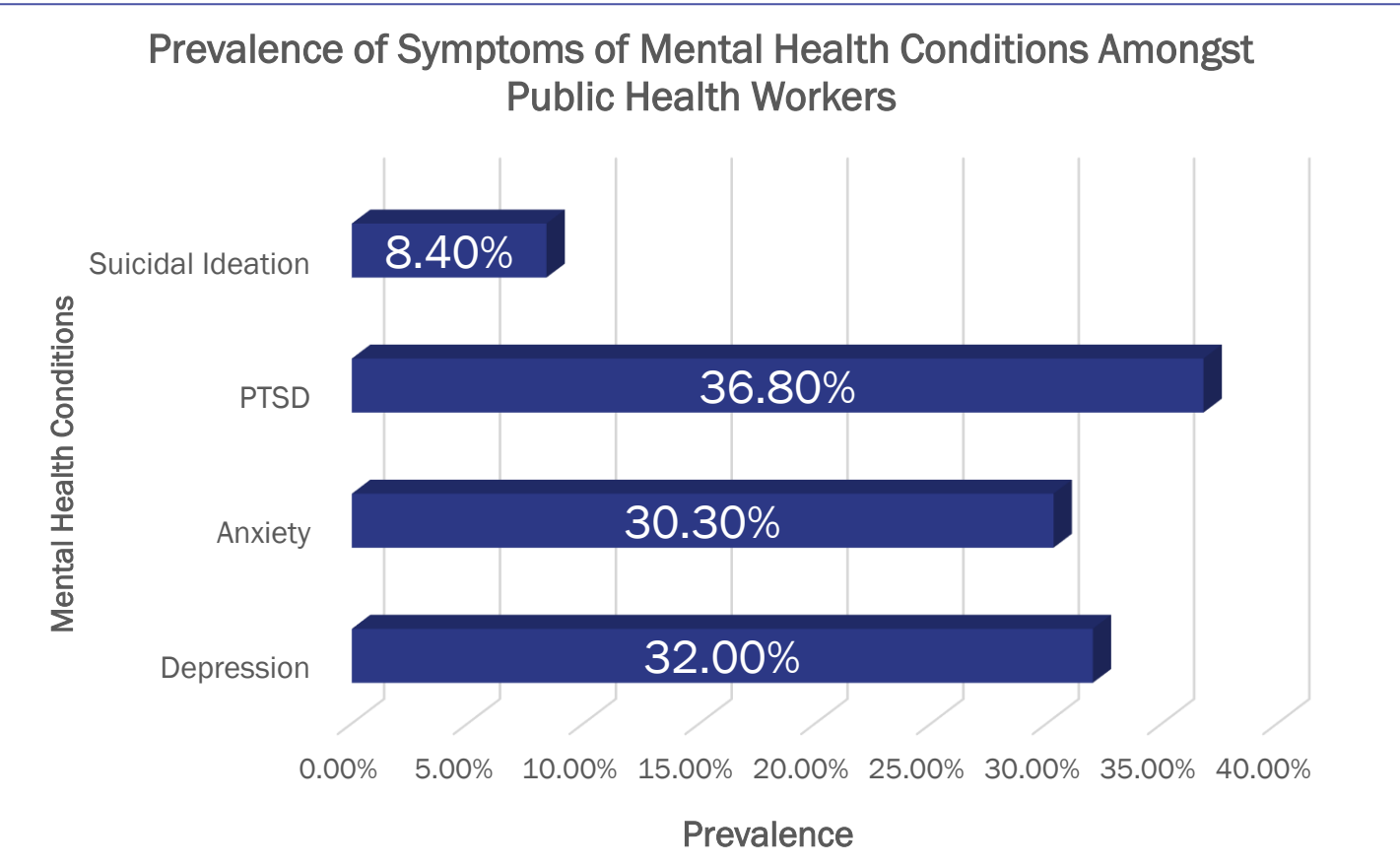


1. We must care for ourselves in direct proportion to the level of the challenge



# CDC reported increased symptoms of mental health issues amongst public health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic

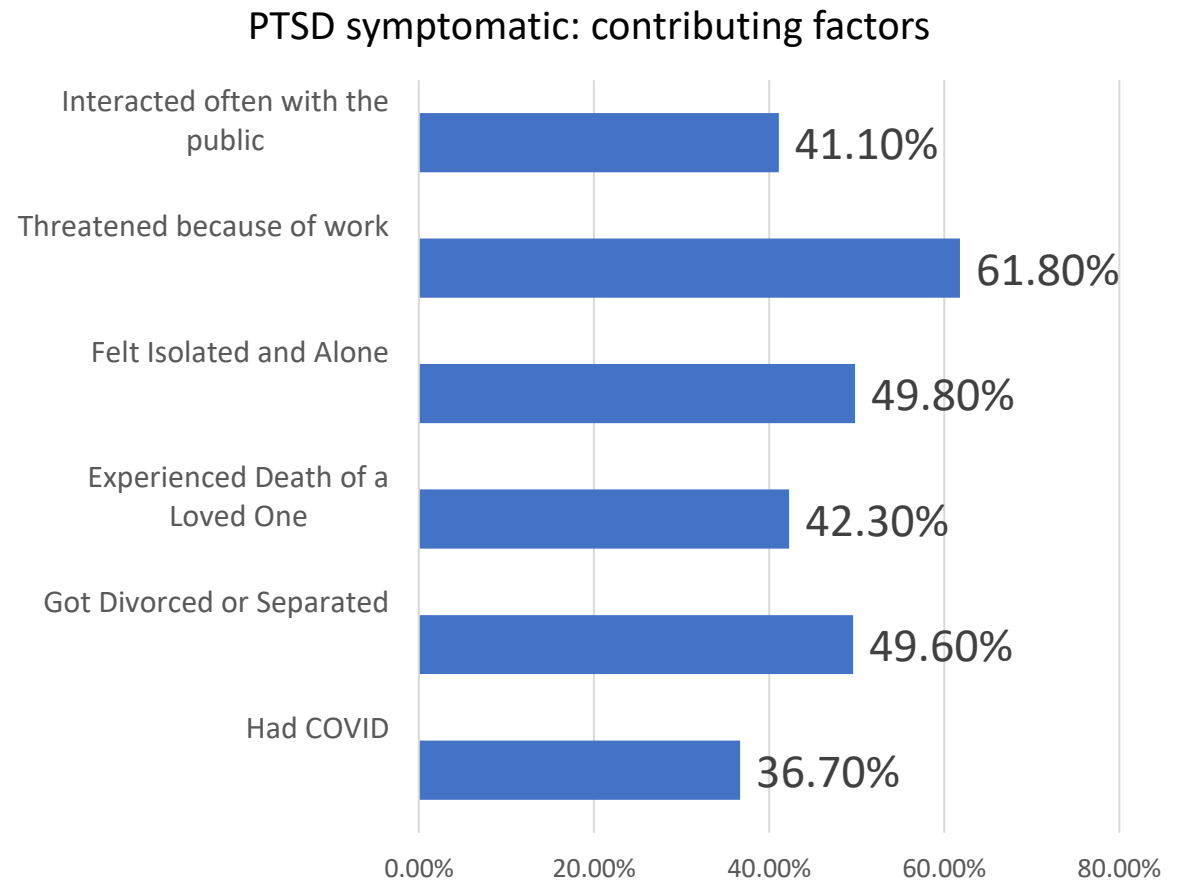
- A nonprobability-based online survey was conducted during March 29–April 16, 2021
- Among the 26,174 respondents 53% reported symptoms of a mental health condition
- Highest prevalence of symptoms was among respondents under 29 years of age and or are transgendered or non-binary
- Assessed by workplace factors and demographics
- CDC reviewed and endorsed methodology
- Overall prevalence higher than general population
- Prevalence of symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder 10% to 20% higher than previous reports (public health workers)



Source: [Symptoms of Depression, Anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Suicidal Ideation Among State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Public Health Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic – United States, March–April 2021 | MMWR \(cdc.gov\)](#)

# Contributing Factors

- Public health workers (PHW) who were unable to take time off from work were more likely to report symptoms (66% sited no work coverage, 20% sited not allowed)
- PHW who felt disconnected from family and friends because of workload
- Traumatic and stressful work experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic
- 72% felt overwhelmed by workload or family/work balance
- 11.8% receiving job-related threats
- 23.4% feeling bullied because of work
- 12.6% reported having received a positive COVID-19 diagnosis



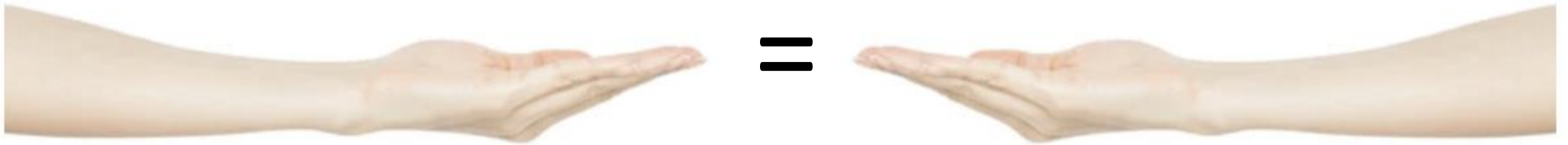
# The Top 10 Careers with High Rates of Depression

<http://www.health.com/health/gallery/0,,20428990,00.html>

1. Personal care workers (nursing home/child care)
2. Food service staff
3. Social workers
4. Healthcare workers (nurses, doctors, other professions)
5. Artists, entertainers, writers
6. Teachers
7. Administrative support staff
8. Maintenance and grounds workers
9. Financial advisors, accountants
10. Salespeople



# Balancing our Stress Levels with our Coping Mechanisms



Ambient Level of Stress

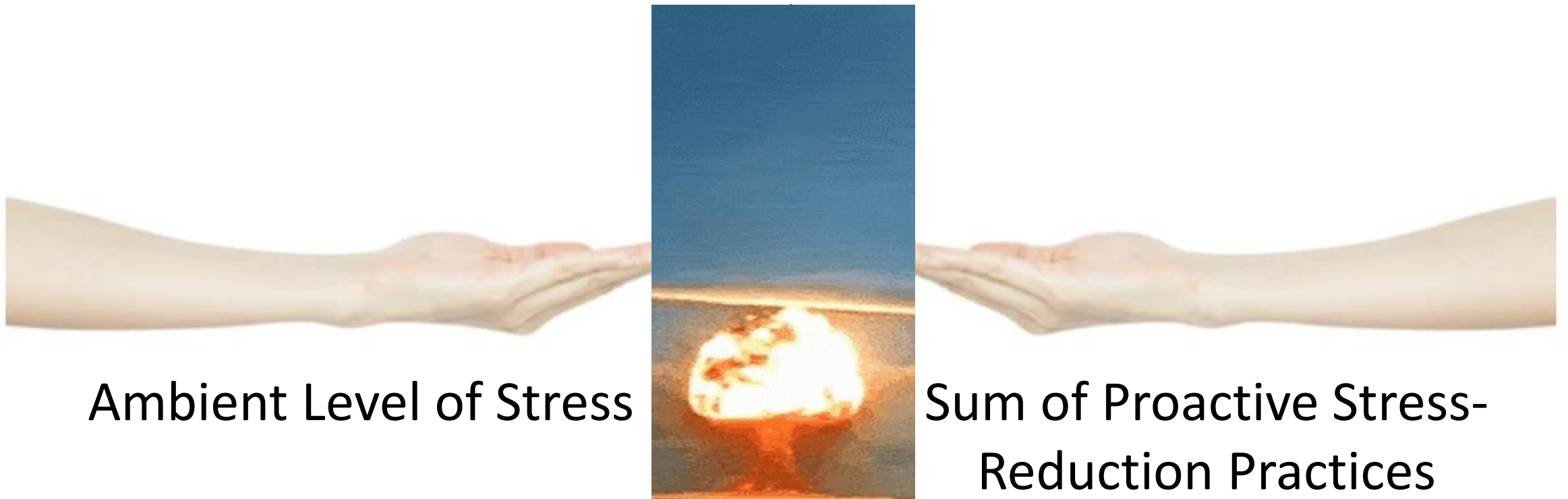
Sum of Proactive Stress-  
Reduction Practices

# Personal Inventory

**Stressors**

**Stress Reduction Practices**

# What Happens to our Coping Mechanisms when Stress Levels Rise?



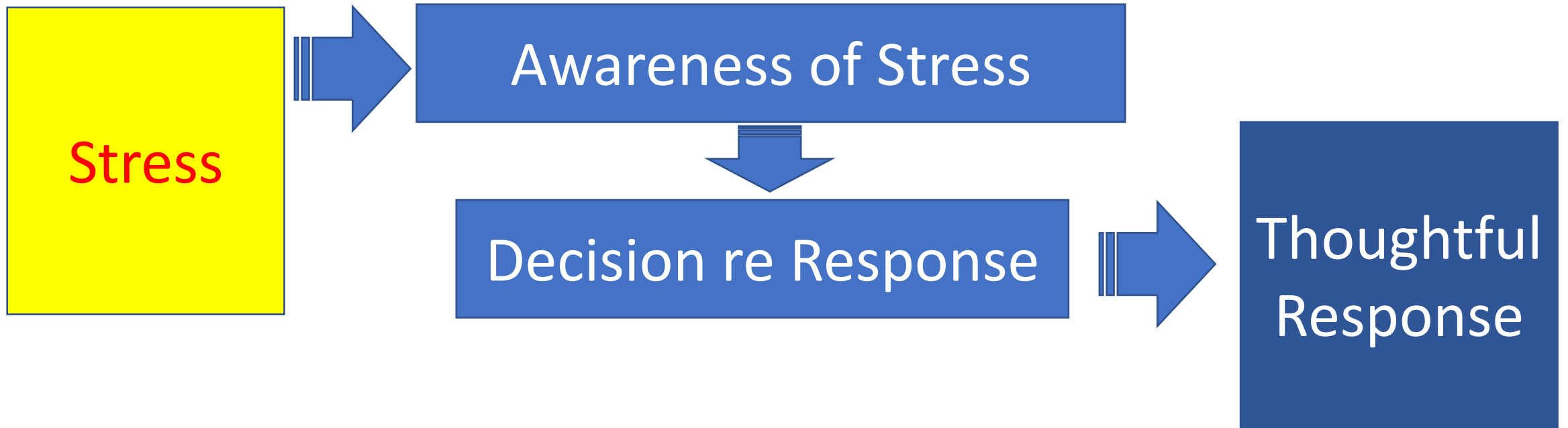
# The Stress Response

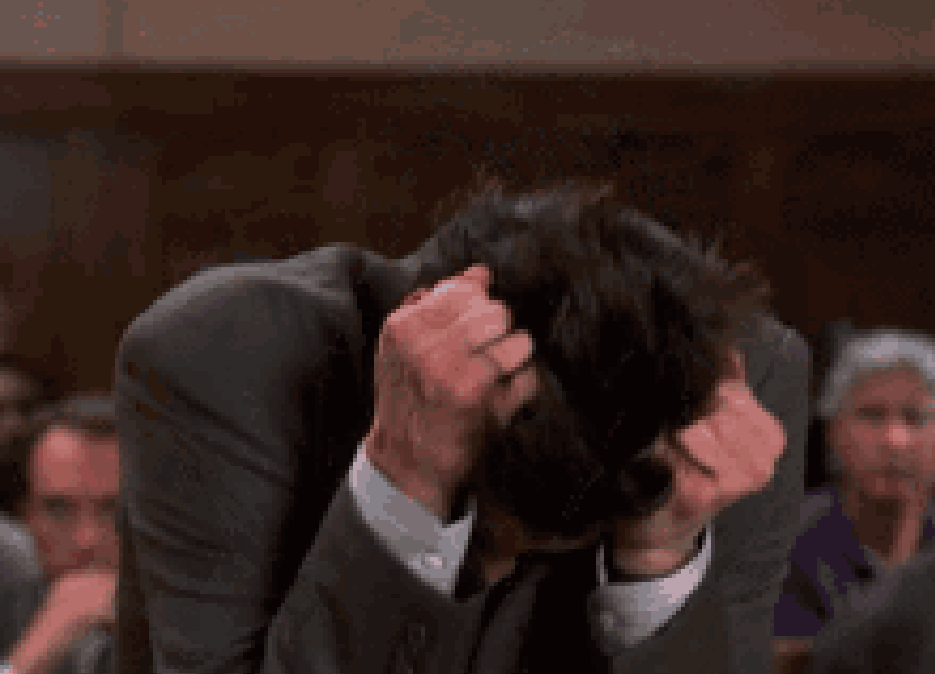


What are your go-to stress responses?



# The “Alternative Pathway” Stress Response





# Awareness of Stress



- Physical and Physiologic Changes and Behaviors
- Emotional Changes and Behaviors
- Intellectual Changes and Behaviors
- Spiritual Changes and Behaviors



# Decision re Response



## Questions to ask

- Is this:
  - *Really* urgent?
  - *Really* important?
  - *My* problem or responsibility?
- How should I respond?
  - The way others are?
  - My own way?
  - Not at all?
- Am I in a good place to decide how to respond?

## Things to do (or not do)

- Take some deep breaths and pay attention to them
- Be an anthropologist: pretend you are simply observing what is going on
- Don't offer opinions (particularly strong ones) – just ask questions
- Consider short term vs. long term benefits of a response

# More Effective Coping Mechanisms Response when Stress Levels Rise

=

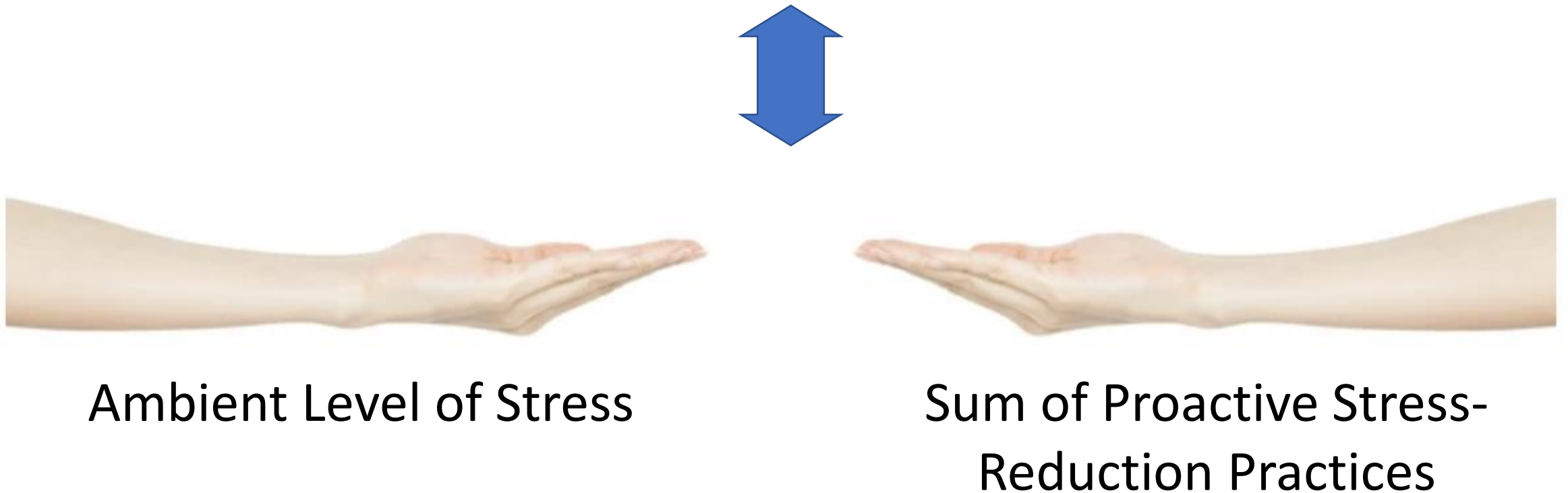


Ambient Level of Stress

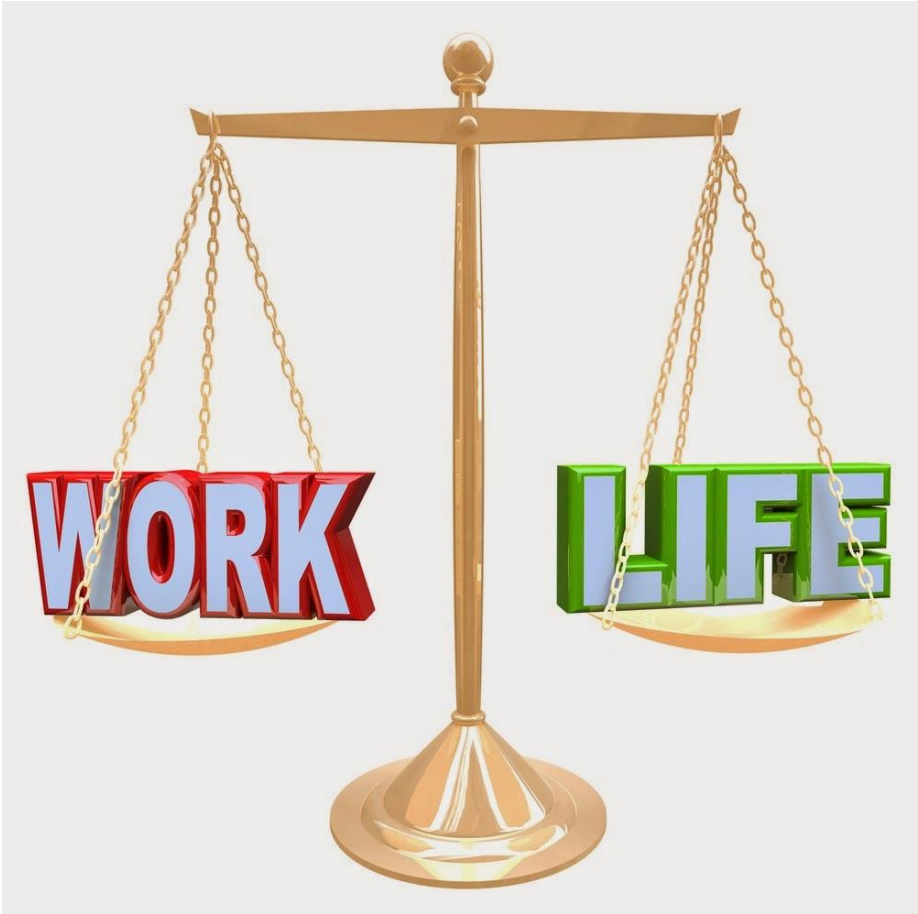


Sum of Proactive Stress-  
Reduction Practices

# MOST Effective Coping Mechanisms Response when a Rise in Stress Levels is Anticipated!



# The Pandemic Challenge: Work-Life Balance



# Balancing Time

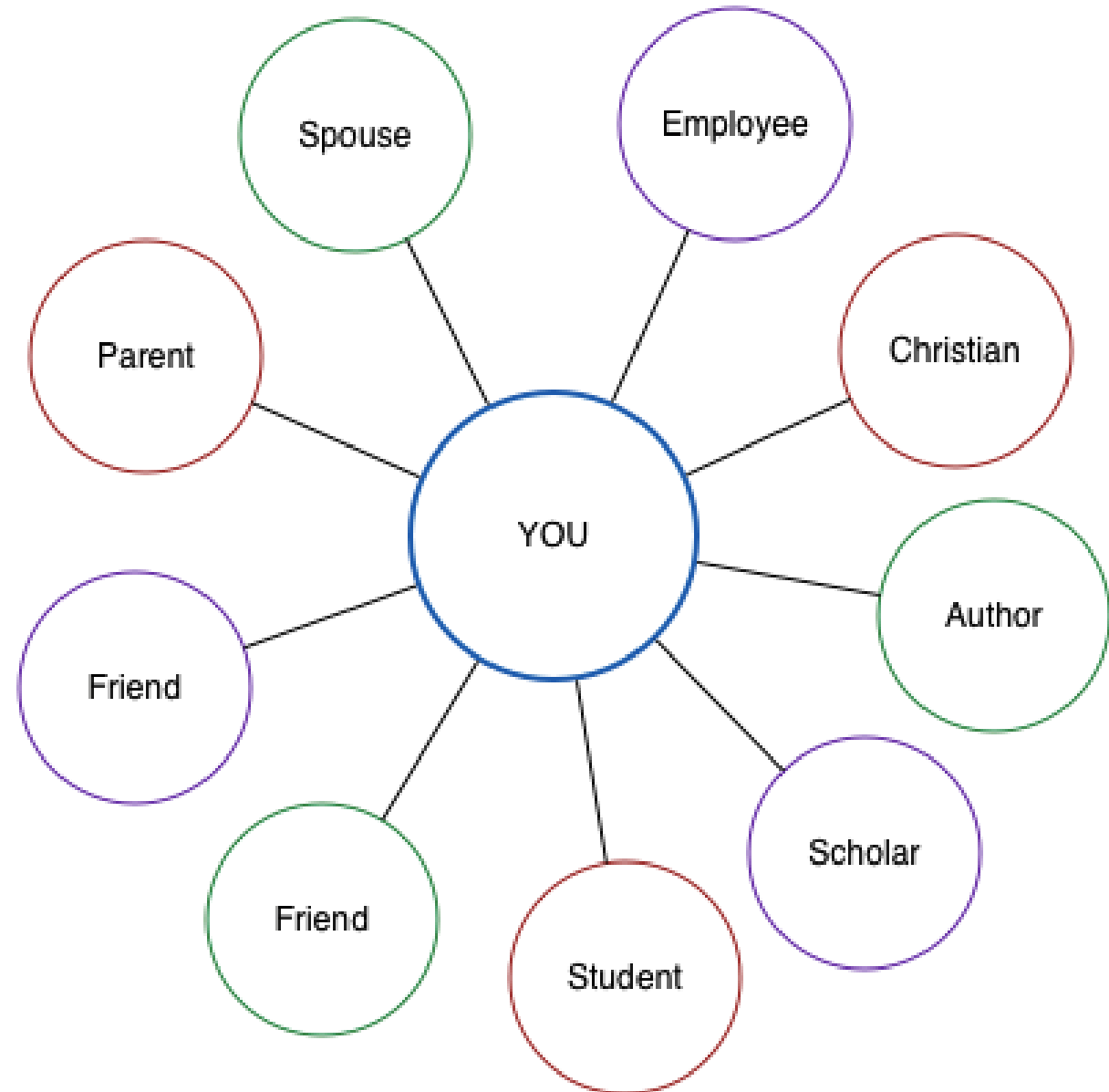
- Many people think of balance as a time management strategy, balancing the **time** spent in different roles or activities





# Balancing Roles

- Others think of balancing various **roles** in our lives



# Balancing Time and Money

- The various balancing acts may change at different points in our lives



# The Health Care Worker's Dilemma

$\infty$  Meeting  
 $\sum_{1}$  everyone  
else's  
needs



# Federico S. A Piece of My Mind: Ditch the Scale! JAMA 2015;314(19):2025-6.

Opinion

A PIECE OF MY MIND

## Ditch the Scale

**Sara M. Federico, MD**  
Department of  
Oncology, St. Jude  
Children's Research  
Hospital, Memphis,  
Tennessee, and  
Department of  
Pediatrics, College of  
Medicine, University of  
Tennessee Health  
Sciences Center,  
Memphis.

**Following the birth of our son**, my husband and I found ourselves the proud parents of three healthy, happy children ... all younger than 3. With this new addition came the need for a larger car; so we threw our "coolness" to the wind and bought a new minivan. I instantly loved this car. It was full of perks and clearly designed for a family with small children, though perhaps I was easy to please given that I was well into my mid 30s and still driving the 1997 Honda Civic I got before going to medical school.

Life was great. It was summertime and I was on maternity leave. It was a nice break from my life as a pediatric oncologist in a large academic center. I was spending time with the kids, completing projects, visiting family and friends. I even took the kids to swim lessons ... during the middle of the day! Who does that? Then ... poof. Just like that, I was back to work.

The first few weeks back were a whirlwind, and they only gained momentum moving forward. My husband and I were suddenly cast back into the reality of two busy careers, three small children, and no local family to help. This is when I first saw those three letters: FCW.

Nearly every morning these letters would suddenly appear on my car's dashboard as I raced to get the kids dropped off and make it to clinic on time. The letters usually arrived with a soft little chime and disappeared as quickly as they came.

FCW.

At first I was alarmed, annoyed really, wondering how we could spend so much money on a brand-new car, only to have problems arise 4 months into ownership. Knowing nothing about cars and forgetting to look it up, each time the alarm sounded I would create a differential diagnosis for the problem. It seemed to me that this light had something to do with cooler temperatures, as it always appeared in the morning. Additionally, it must involve moving the steering wheel, since it often occurred with lane changes. I was stumped.

And then one day, much to my surprise, FCW was starting me down ... in the evening.

Ugh. I didn't have time for this. I had been up since 5 AM, worked out, somehow managed to get our three little people out of the door to school and day care, saw numerous patients in clinic, gave good news, gave bad news, saw more patients, gave more bad news, was attempting to get lunch when my phone alarm sounded. Oh no. It was 5:30 PM and time to get the kids. I quickly dismissed the idea of lunch (after all, it was nearly dinnertime) and raced out of the building to make the pickup time of 6 PM.

FCW.

When I saw the light that evening, I pulled over to check it out; after all it was late in the day, and hot and humid, and I wasn't changing lanes. My prior differential went straight out the window. In my mind there

was absolutely no reason the light could flash. I quickly consulted Dr Google and learned that FCW stood for "forward collision warning—a warning light that alarms if your speed is faster than the objects you are approaching."

FCW. In that moment I realized that these three letters described my life in a nutshell, traveling at 100 mph when everything else is going 30 mph. This light was more than a mere annoyance; it was a warning. Slow down! Get control! But how?

You see, throughout my medical training I attended many didactics on the work/life balance. Each course offered important warnings and recommendations on how to balance your life, yet the conclusions were always the same: pay attention to the details, and you can maintain the work/life balance. I remember thinking, fair enough. I'm goal-oriented, and with my eye on the prize this whole balance thing should be ... easy-peasy! Indeed, even during the bleary-eyed days of my pediatric residency when years of a Q3-4 call schedule blended together, I would reflect on those lectures and feel peace in knowing that recognition of the problem was half the battle. Right?

Wrong.

When I picked pediatric oncology as a career, I had a fairly good sense of what this field of medicine would entail. I knew it would be an incredibly rewarding job with a crazy lifestyle. I knew there would be heartache. I knew I would be challenged in ways I couldn't imagine and that there would be undefinable joy and triumph. I was not surprised; this job is all of those things and so much more. It is the best job for me.

The same can be said of motherhood. When our twin girls arrived on the scene in the summer of 2010, I was certain my heart might explode. I knew that there was no greater love than my love for our children. I knew I would never work so hard or be challenged in so many ways. I knew it would be incredibly rewarding with a crazy lifestyle. I knew there would be heartache, joy, and triumph. I was not surprised. When our son arrived, as anticipated, love multiplied, and although the house grew exponentially more chaotic, it was just as I imagined ... and so much more. Being a mother to our children is my most favorite thing.

So what was the problem? Why then did these three little letters on the dashboard of my swagger wagon stop me in my tracks?

For the next two weeks, the FCW alarm may as well have been the sound track of my own real life drama. Work, family ... family, work; toss into the mix work travel, 3 sick kids, a dying dog, a puking cat, an overdue manuscript, grant deadline, and more. I could barely keep up, and in the moment I felt like I had failed. I kept reflecting back to all of the advice dispensed over the years about balance and the steps one can take to create bal-

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jama.com

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There is only one type of balance under your control ...

- We can't really balance things outside of us that we don't control
- But perhaps we can create some balance inside of ourselves



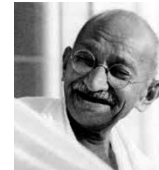
# Happiness

“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.”

**Mahatma Gandhi**

(1869-1948\*)

Leader of Indian Nationalism  
in British-ruled India



# The Medicine Wheel

- Native American symbol for medicine, health and balance:
  - North = Mental
  - East = Spiritual
  - South = Emotional
  - West = Physical



# Spinning Your Own Gyroscope!

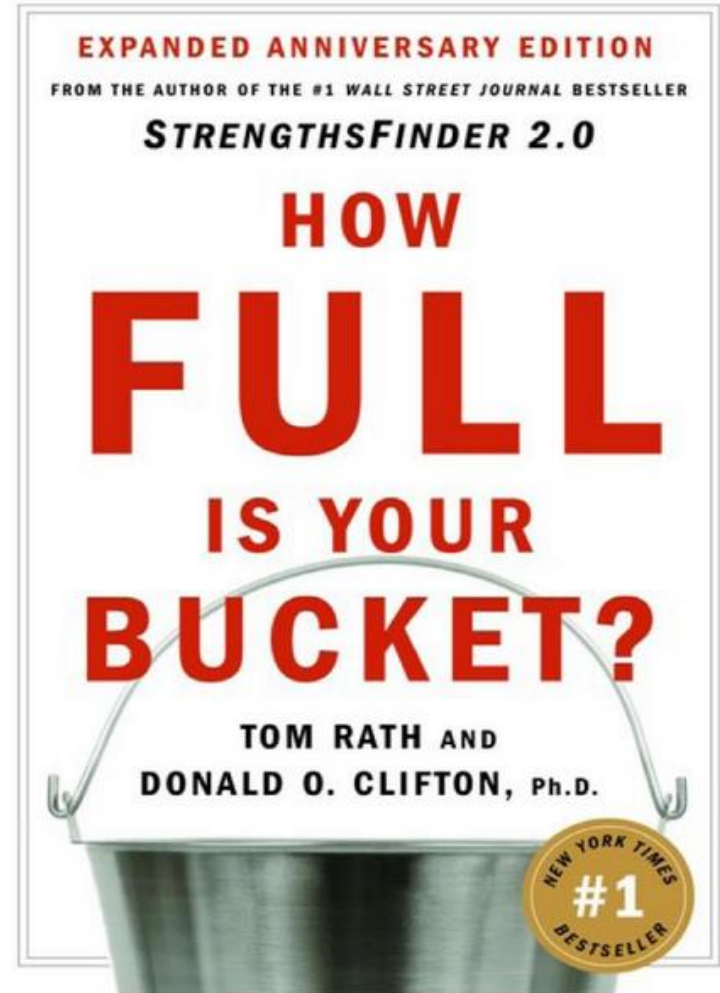
- Since it isn't possible to get through a day in health care without some stress or crisis, we probably all need the "habits of mind" to create the internal momentum we need to remain calm.





# Filling your own bucket

- **How Full is Your Bucket: Positive Strategies for Work and Life**, by Tom Rath and Donald Clifton, PhD
- Based on Gallup polling of tens of millions of Americans




# How Full is My Bucket?

- From 0 to 100%, how full is my bucket each morning when I leave for work?



# How do we effectively support ourselves and each other at work?

- Learn about and acknowledge trauma and PTSD
- Practice relaxation techniques
- Pursue outdoor activities
- Confide in a person you trust
- Spend time with positive people
- Avoid alcohol and drugs
- Enjoy the peace of nature
- Reach out to EAP or 988






for emotional or substance use crisis  
**CALL / TEXT / CHAT 988**

Help & Hope in New Mexico  
**988**

24/7 Lifeline


Visit [988NM.org](https://988NM.org)  
for more info

@988NewMexico    

**Reasons to Call 988**

- Worried about your safety or someone you know?
- Having a hard time managing strong emotions?
- Feeling hopeless, confused, angry or lonely?
- Worried about alcohol or drug use?
- Need help finding local community services?

Behavioral Health Services Division  
HUMAN SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT



One last thank you!

“We learned about gratitude and humility - that so many people had a hand in our success.”

Michelle Obama



Questions, Comments, Discussion



- Edited video

- Original video

