

# numa

caring for the spirit in island health

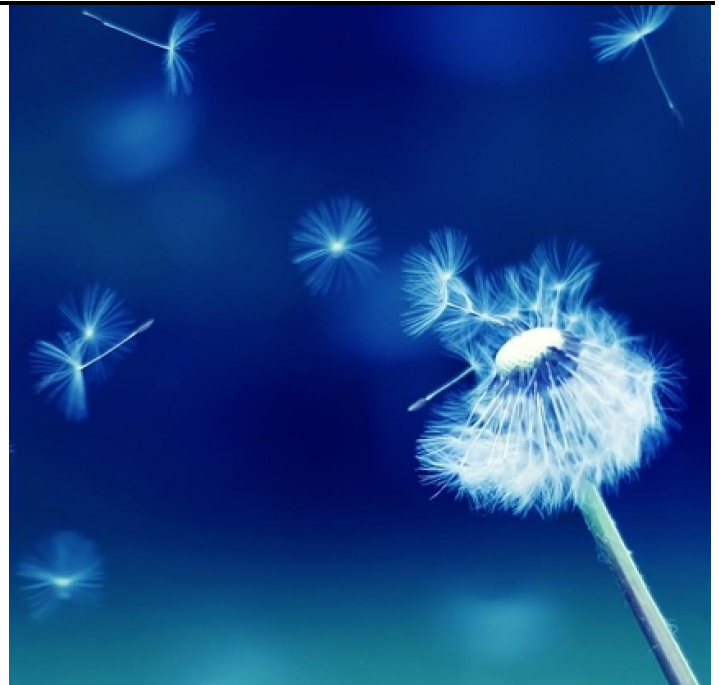
## SPIRITUAL P.P.E.

Through the COVID-19 pandemic health care professionals have become acutely aware of the importance of PPE and of following the steps to properly don and doff personal protective equipment. We don gowns and gloves, masks and shields because of all that we might be exposed to in a given shift. Viruses, bacteria and a whole host of other foreign bodies (that are not good for our bodies) threaten health care workers at every turn. Good PPE practice is part of our professional work ethic.

While we do fairly well in the area of keeping our bodies safe there is another area which calls us to be just as vigilant. It is the area of protecting ourselves from all the other kinds of "stuff" we get exposed to on a given day. Each day health care professionals are exposed to a wide variety of traumatic events including death, pain, loss and grief. Exposure to these events and emotions can affect our health and well being significantly. With

**Above all else protect your heart  
for everything you do flows from it.**

Jewish Proverb



this in mind it is important that health care professionals develop practices that help protect them from exposures that could negatively affect their mental health.

*Spiritual Donning.* In health care donning refers to the act of covering oneself for protection. We don ourselves with gowns, gloves and masks so that we are protected. In the same way it's important to consider what do we don our hearts and minds with to protect us from what we are exposed to? How do we prepare for the work day? Do we have practices of centering? Do our team huddles and rounds help prepare us for the day? What can we put on before

work to help us prepare for the day? I recall a colleague who experienced significant trauma during the course of his work. Part of his graduated return to work included meeting with a site Spiritual Health Practitioner prior to his shift. That meeting involved centering and preparing for the day ahead. In this meeting he learned to “put on” courage, compassion and patience. What might you need to “put on” each day to guard your heart and mind for the work ahead? Is there something, or someone, in your own cultural or religious background that can help you don hope and courage for the day ahead?

*Spiritual Doffing.* Likewise spiritual doffing might be understood as practices we engage in to help remove the impact of what we have experienced that day. Spiritual doffing practices might include connecting with our team or a colleague to help heal the impact of something that has gotten stuck in us during the day. Perhaps it was witnessing a trauma, a poor encounter with a patient, a hard conversation with a colleague, internal feelings of fear or moral distress. Intentional spiritual doffing can help us acknowledge what we have faced in the day and give us the space to view it, understand it and help remove its impact on our hearts.

Not protecting ourselves from exposures to traumatic events is just as unprofessional as not protecting ourselves physically from any contagions we come into contact with. Having good hygiene practices, whether physical or spiritual, is at the center of good care for ourselves and others.

*(Thanks to Dr. Timothy Black (UVic) who, during a recent conversation, shared about the connection between physical and psychological hygiene practices.)*

NUMA (Greek for “spirit/breath”) is produced by Island Health’s [Spiritual Health](#) team to draw awareness to issues of spirituality in health care. The editor of numa is Darren Colyn, Spiritual Health Leader. To read past issues of NUMA go to [Spiritual Health’s Professional Practice webpage](#) and look under “Resources”.

## **Donning and Doffing. A Spiritual Practice**

### **Hand Hygiene**

Washing away past and future,  
I enter fully into the present,  
meeting what is arising here and now.

### **Donning Gown**

I don this gown of protection and compassion  
for both my own wellbeing,  
and for those I serve/support/help.

### **Donning Mask**

May this mask help me to truly/deeply see  
the person/people I am helping today  
and speak words that bring relief/comfort/ease

### **Donning Gloves**

These gloves remind me  
that these are the hands of compassion/a healer,  
may I use them well.

### **Doffing Gown and Gloves**

*(untying belt)*

Untying the bonds of separation,

*(crossing arms to shoulders)*

I embrace all beings.

*(Tearing away neck strap)*

Breaking free of fear

*(Rolling gloves and gown into ball)*

In this moment we all come together.

### **Hand Hygiene**

Washing away past and future,  
I enter fully into the present,  
meeting what is arising here and now.

### **Doffing Mask**

Seeing with new eyes in each moment,  
with each breath I am reborn.  
*(Take 1 or more breaths with awareness)*

### **Hand Hygiene**

Washing away past and future,  
I enter fully into the present,  
Meeting what is arising here and now.

Eshu Martin

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