

numa

caring for the spirit in island health

THIRD WAVE

I started writing this particular NUMA back in October 2020 when there was talk of a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. I shelved it since, at the time, it seemed like we were learning how to manage the second wave pretty well. Like many I naively thought that that second wave might be the last push of this pandemic and that we would soon be off into a bright and wave free 2021. Well, here we are four months into the new year with a third wave spilling all around us and so here is a humble reflection on how we might endure this, and any additional, COVID-19 waves.

The first time I encountered huge ocean waves wasn't on the blissful beaches of our island's west coast but rather on the beaches of Maui's North Shore. Travelling with some fifty members of my high school wrestling team this was the first time any of us saw waves like that. Most of us were cautious about getting into the sea with such enormous waves but one team member was not. One burly heavy weight descended down the black sand beach and stood defiantly before



the on-coming wave. As the wave took shape and began to loom over him he dug his feet into the wet sand, ready to take the full brunt of its force. You can imagine the result. He was smashed down and dragged across the sea floor then spewed, rashy and raw, at our feet.

I think that is the fear of these ongoing waves of COVID-19. Each time they loom over us we feel helpless as we stand directly before their powerful path. The thing that fills us with angst is that we fear we won't be able to withstand what is going to happen, that we won't be strong enough to endure this wave.

As my teammate tended to his wounds from that wave's great pounding I recall watching a young Hawaiian boy, knee board in hand, run straight towards the sea. He walked into the water as a giant wave set and crested towards him. Surely another washout. But no. He knew the sea. He knew the waves. He knew a definitive path through them and how to ride them. As the wave began to curl he dove right into the center of it and popped up safe on the other side. A wide smile crossed his

You cannot stop the waves. But you can learn to surf.

JonKabat Zin

face as he swam out through more waves to eventually find a big one to ride in.

I've only surfed a handful of times in my life. Generally I just went for it and suffered the consequences of not having had some training. Finally, a few years ago, I took a class. It was a beautiful morning session on Cox Bay beach where a young instructor taught us the basics of how to ride the waves. Our teacher had seen a thousand waves and taught us the ins and out of surfing. She taught us how to paddle out, swim through waves and how to eventually get up on our boards to try and ride a wave in. Her tips and tricks immensely helped improve our ability to ride the waves.

In reality we've all been in COVID surf school for quite a while now. We've worked hard at developing skills and systems to know how to ride these waves. Yes, waves of whatever sort can be scary but when we know how waves work we can be safe and go a long way. As Buddhist teacher Jon Kabat Zin shares "you cannot stop the waves – but you can learn to surf".

So what have we learned about surfing this COVID sea? We've learned that that the basics matter. Washing hands, staying apart, only travelling if it's essential and limiting our bubbles. We learned that health care workers are not immune and that these same practices need to be carried out in our work and personal lives. We've learned that lunch rooms aren't havens where we let our guard down but are places to yet remain vigilant.

We've learned to prioritize our emotional and spiritual well being. Taking care of ourselves and our loved ones. We've learned to know our limits and the [resources](#) available to us when we feel overwhelmed.

We've also learned to trust and learn from each other. We've learned to see how certain folks in our circles can inspire us and teach us to cope through these trying times. Those who model for us how to get through these turbulent times. Those whose gentle words help guide us to take time

away from the surging shoreline of work so that we can care for ourselves.

We also have learned that these waves, as challenging as they are, have not overtaken us. We have come a long way and there should be no shortage of inner pride for what we have already accomplished and for the countless people we have cared for through this time.

While we all have moments that we gasp at the seeming might of the waves before us we are also invited to stop, take a breath, look around for those who inspire us and rely on our learning so that we can continue to ride this wave and ride it well.

Island Health's Spiritual Health Practitioners (SHP) are available to help support staff with spiritual, cultural and emotional care.

To connect with the Spiritual Health Practitioner at your site consult the list below:

NRGH, Marysia Riverin – ext. 54022

VGH, Michael Politano-Bowles – ext. 14278

RJH, Peter Shurvin, ext. 18207

SPH, Oceanna Hall, ext. 23322

CDH, Marnie Roper, ext. 44289

If you are at a site without a SHP please call 250-755-7691 (ext. 54428) or email spiritualhealth@viha to discuss options for support.

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 learn more about Island Health's Spiritual Health program visit the [Spiritual Health Professional Practice](#) page and to read past issues of NUMA go to the [Spiritual Health public webpage](#).