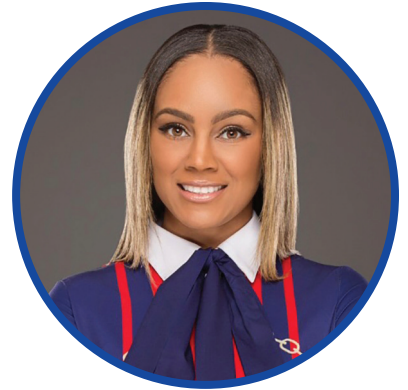


Put Yourself First— Words to Live By

BY DR. CHEYENNE BRYANT



As a practicing psychology expert of 13 years and a life coach, I can tell you just how important it is to take care of yourself and your mental health before you can truly provide care to others. Put yourself first: this mantra is especially important today as we continue to grapple with the implications and fallout from the COVID-19 global pandemic.

A Little About Me

I entered psychology shortly after determining that law was not a fit for me and my future. I sought God's guidance during this transition, as I began to understand my traumas, broken pieces, and pain pockets. I learned new things about myself and my brokenness. God taught me how to take those broken pieces and make complete peace from them, a state which I call God's Peace. This experience revealed to me my true self and my purpose: pursuing psychology to help others find peace in their lives.

It was not until I got to this space of peace that I learned it is possible for people to live a quality life and have peace of mind even after experiencing turmoil or hardships—whether that hardship is a health condition, a divorce or painful breakup, or childhood trauma. Some of my own turmoil stemmed from my childhood. My maternal grandmother has been fighting cancer since I was a little girl. She was first diagnosed and treated for stomach cancer, which later recurred as breast and cervical cancer, respectively. She's experienced cancer and its treatments on an ongoing basis through

chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery. The doctors originally gave her 5 years to live, which was about 25 years ago today. She is now 76 years old and a total powerhouse! Recently, my paternal grandmother was diagnosed with colon cancer. So the experience of cancer really hits home for me.

As a practicing psychology expert, I help people create a peace plan using a hybrid method of therapy and coaching that I have developed. (Learn more at drbryantinstitute.com.) I work to help people get to where they want to be in life in a healthy, effective manner. A large portion of this work is to first understand ourselves—our traumas and triggers—so that we can become more empowered in our daily lives. Caring for yourself and your mental health first is especially important for those in healthcare. Your mental health needs to be at 100 percent, so you can provide the quality care your patients need and deserve.

The Trauma of Oncology

Cancer is more than just a physical disease that requires medical treatment; it impacts the mind, body, and spirit. Cancer is also a condition without a known cure—despite promising treatments that continue to be discovered. And sometimes, after finishing treatment, cancer returns in one way or another, like in the case of my grandmother. For anyone diagnosed with cancer, helping care for someone with cancer or providing treatment for cancer can be mentally and physically draining.

Working day after day in the field of oncology and hematology can be traumatic.

Cancer care team members often experience secondary and third-level trauma. When patients ask questions like, "Am I going to be okay?" or make statements like, "I'm feeling sad, depressed, and lonely," some cancer care team members may feel as though they are acting as therapists or mental health professionals when they are not trained to do so.

I have nurse and physician clients who treat both patients with cancer and those with COVID-19. These healthcare professionals must be able to deliver what the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (ihi.org) calls the right care to the right person at the right time.¹ But this quality of care is challenging. And when my nurse and physician clients come into their sessions, they often share that it's the job that is traumatic and weighing on their hearts and minds. I advise these clients—and every healthcare professional—to focus on self-care and their own mental health and well-being first so that they can provide that to their patients as well.

Because those words are often easier said than done, here are a few actionable tips to help.

Tip 1. Consult with a Mental Health Professional

Human life is like a garden. Through therapy, we take inventory of our garden and nurture or grow the positive, healthy aspects of our life while simultaneously pruning or weeding out what does not work for us or what is no longer serving us. A mental health professional can help you through

(Continued on page 88)

(Continued from page 86)

this “gardening” process. I advise people to avoid the stigma that you should only seek out help when you have “issues.” Instead, embrace therapy as a safe space and a place to go to build up your mental health and resiliency. By being proactive with your mental health and well-being, you will have the tools and a go-to coach or therapist ready to help you meet challenges or adverse circumstances (like a global pandemic) in a healthy, effective manner. A mental health professional can also play a preventative role—especially for individuals who may have never experienced anxiety, depression, or isolation pre-COVID-19.

Tip 2. Find a Place to Debrief and Exchange Emotions

It should be mandatory that every cancer program or practice provides a place for their staff to mentally debrief. This should be a space where staff can have a comfortable 30 minutes on their own to relax, sit with their emotions and feelings, and (hopefully) recharge. Debriefing can also be effective when time is shared with others. Colleagues are there for support and to show you that you are not alone. Whatever you are feeling, trust me, others are also feeling it. By coming together as a group to debrief about your day or week, cancer care team

members can learn from each other’s coping mechanisms or tips and tools to improve resiliency and well-being. There is immense power in exchanging emotions and processing feelings with others who understand your professional work and experiences.


Tip 3. Take Up Journaling

Get yourself a journal to capture your emotions, thoughts, and feelings in words. The benefits of journaling are well documented in medical and scientific literature. Below your colleagues at Intermountain Healthcare—an ACCC member program—share five powerful health benefits of journaling:²

1. Journaling reduces stress.
2. Journaling improves immune function.
3. Journaling keeps memory sharp.
4. Journaling boosts mood.
5. Journaling strengthens emotional functions.

Tip 4. Embrace Your Humanity

Do not put on a cape and think that you must be Superman or Superwoman. That mindset can break you down and burn you out. When you burn out and your immune system is compromised or you get sick, you cannot do your job and you even may begin to feel burdened by your work. Almost the

worst thing we can do as healthcare professionals is to not take care of ourselves. If you take away only one message from this article, it should be this one: “It is okay to ask for and receive help.” As healthcare professionals and healers, we must be reminded that there is power in asking for and receiving help. We are not meant to do it all on our own. 

Dr. Chyenne Bryant is a psychology expert, a life coach, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Branch No. 1069, founder of the Dr. Bryant Institute, founder of the Dr. Bryant Foundation, author, motivational speaker, community activist, host, and brand ambassador.

References

1. Institute for Healthcare Improvement. WIHI: The Right Care, Right Setting, and Right Time of Hospital Flow. Available online at: ihi.org/resources/Pages/AudioandVideo/WIHI-Right-Care-Right-Setting-Right-Time-of-Hospital-Flow.aspx. Published March 9, 2017. Last accessed October 19, 2021.
2. Bailey K. 5 Powerful health benefits of journaling. Available online at: intermountainhealthcare.org/blogs/topics/live-well/2018/07/5-powerful-health-benefits-of-journaling. Published July 13, 2018. Last accessed August 20, 2021.

