

How does hope affect and help us?

HOPE
Hope is the thing
with feathers
that perches in the
soul,
And sings the tune
without the words,
And never stops
at all.
—Emily Dickinson



HOMEFRONT:
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William M. Buchholz, M.D., shared an enlightening perspective in his brief story titled "The Medical Uses of Hope." He wrote, "As I was eating breakfast one morning, I overheard two oncologists discussing the papers they were to

present ... One was complaining bitterly?" "You know, Bob, I just don't understand it. We used the same drugs, the same dosage, the same schedule and the same entry criteria. Yet I got a 22 percent response rate and you got a 74 percent. That's unheard of for metastatic lung cancer. How do you do it?"

"We're both using Etoposide, Platinol, Oncovin, Hydroxurea. You call yours EPOH. I tell my patients I'm giving them HOPE. Sure, I tell them this is experimental, and we go over the long list of side-effects together. But I emphasize that we have a

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chance. As dismal as the statistics are for non-small cell, there are always a few percent who do really well."

Is it truly possible that someone has the power to generate hope in another? Day-in and day-out, as a therapist, I listen to others as they cope with challenges, address problems, and strive to live more fully. As someone struggles to change, or heal from a major loss or transition, I experience

genuine hope for them. How does hope, or lack of hope, affect us?

Current studies pertaining to the brain by Dan Siegel and others illustrate the power of relationships. Researchers from Italy (Gallesse, Fadiga, Fogassi & Rizzohatti, 1996) have discovered the "social nature of our brains" (Siegel, 1996), which does suggest that in a relationship, hope may be experienced by one individual and mirrored neurologically by another.

Whether genuine hope is a feeling, in our hearts, our souls, or in our brain, it encompasses positive energy that helps us persevere and have positive outcomes. Families deal with situations that involve hope daily. Often our responses are genuine, yet there are times that we extend false hope. For example, when a son or daughter tries out for a sport and doesn't make the team. Do we immediately state "you will make it next year?" Or, do we step back and assess

the situation in order to comfort, and provide genuine hope versus false hope?

Let's look at another example. A teenage daughter's relationship ends precipitously. Do you respond by saying, "There are many fish in the sea" as I overheard one mother? Or, following comforting her, do you provide her genuine optimism in her needed direction? My last example is one of two middle-age sisters. One sister shared her anxiety about her bright young adult daughter having difficulty acquiring employment in her career. Her sister's response was, "Have a glass of wine, everything will be fine." Instead of this response, the woman

needed a listening ear and a genuine sense that her daughter would succeed. She needed hope.

In summary, genuine hope often includes empathy during challenging moments. It is empowering, and suggests a future optimistic outcome. Genuine hope carries us through exciting challenges and difficult times. Emily Dickinson equated hope to a feather, perched in the soul. It has a sense of lightness, sound resonates, yet lacks in words. Hope is often at our core, or

soul, and remains unwavering as we journey forward.

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