

Last week I had the opportunity to “attend”, along with 17,000+ others, a webinar entitled: Covid-19 Conversations: The Science of Social Distancing, offered by NAM (the National Academy of Medicine) & APHA (the American Public Health Association).

Did you know? Social distancing has been documented as far back as the Black Death (Bubonic Plague) that ravaged Europe & Asia in 1347–1351. It was documented that the port city of Ragusa, in Venice, was able to slow the spread of the plague by keeping arriving sailors in isolation until it was clear none were carrying the disease. Initially, sailors were held on their ships for 30 days (a trentino). That period was later increased to 40 days (a quarantine). (History Channel...”Black Death”...by History.com Editors)

So what is “social distancing”? Social distancing is the act of isolating, quarantining, keeping a minimum of 6 feet between people when in public places, for the purpose of decreasing transmission of a disease to others. Why is this important?

Current research has shown that the main transmission route of Covid-19 is respiratory secretions/droplets. Anytime we speak, cough, sing, sneeze we release minuscule droplets of moisture into the air in our immediate area. If one has contracted Covid-19 those droplets will contain the virus and can thereby be inhaled by someone who is standing within that 6 foot area. Maintaining a 6 foot distance is one of the single most effective behaviors we can practice to keep ourselves safe. (CDC – Centers for Disease Control)

What are some other behaviors we can do to decrease our exposure to Covid-19? We can decrease the amount of time spent in public spaces (i.e.: limit grocery shopping to one time a week), work from home if that is an option, avoid travel if possible, remain at home as much as possible.

Social distancing is not a cure. Social distancing buys time: Time to increase testing for the disease; Time to increase tracking of contacts for those who contract the disease. Social distancing helps to keep the health care system functioning by: Decreasing the need for ICU beds, equipment, & staff; Decreasing the need for PPE (personal protective equipment: gowns, masks, gloves) that are in short supply; Decreasing exposure of health care staff to an increased number of people with Covid-19.

There is still much that needs to be learned about Covid-19. This is not an episode of CSI. All the questions will not be answered in an hour; or a day; or even a month. I have every confidence that scientists the world over are feverishly working to develop a treatment & vaccine to combat this virus.

So how long is this likely to last? To quote my mother, "Until I say so." I think that is mom-speak for, "I haven't made a decision on that yet." This is uncharted ground for all of us & we are all learning as we go. Until the time we can be together again:

Stay safe! Be healthy!

Wash your hands!

God's blessings & peace to you all!

Donna Musselman, RN, CNOR

UPG Parish Nurse