

Editorial

New Year's Resolutions

Meredith Wallace Kazer, PhD, APRN-BC, FAAN
Editor-in-Chief

With the coming of each New Year, I begin to ponder a resolution. I like to think of this as pattern of self-reflection – identifying something that's not quite working and devising a plan to fix it. The resolution process has become so traditional that my friends and families begin to ask me about it around Thanksgiving time. With a few exceptions, I'm pretty good at sticking to these resolutions and working them into my personal and professional lives, although some could be perceived as less ambitious than others. For example, one of my most infamous resolutions was to wear more hats, which I continue religiously. A few years ago, I gave up road rage. I floated the idea of holding more grudges, but at the urging of both family and friends who would undoubtedly suffer from such a resolution, I decided to go to the gym twice a week – a resolution that was notably better for my personal and relational health. Through my leadership role at the University, I leveraged this resolution to facilitate a steeply discounted gym membership for faculty and staff that continues today.

As 2018 came to a close, the idea for my new year's resolution presented itself in a series of media stories about the plastic recycling problem we are facing in our nation. By popular reports more than 300 tons of plastic are produced globally each year and only about ten percent is recycled. China - where the U.S. had previously shipped most of our recyclables – has recently placed restrictions on accepting most U.S. plastics which has reduced the market for recyclables among waste-management companies (Semuals, 2019). Most of the plastics now end up in the landfills where they will sit for hundreds of years, or in waterways where they will be consumed by fish and wildlife. What can be done to resolve this issue? According to Dr. Trevor Zink from the University of Loyola Marymount, "The answer is all about consumption. As Dr. Zink puts it, recycling can never make up for consumption. The real environmental value can be achieved through simply reducing our consumption. (Sudakow, 2018)"

So for 2019, I decided to give up plastics – at least to greatest extent possible. This is no easy task. I conducted substantial research to determine what plastics I buy and ultimately dispose of which I could substitute with more environmentally friendly-packaged products or do without. I used a top down approach beginning with a shampoo bar, bamboo toothbrush and Eco-dent floss. I make my own toothpaste with baking soda and coconut oil (a combination of which may oddly also be used for deodorant). I never buy single-use plastic water bottles, soda, etc. or Styrofoam coffee cups and use refillable water bottles and cups instead. I keep recyclable bags in the car and use them for not only groceries, but everything - clothes, beauty supplies, and medications. I bought reusable straws and distributed them to my family. I buy fresh from the bakery or produce department instead of prepackaged items in a plastic and choose cardboard containers for milk and juice, cleaning products, dish and laundry detergent, buying in bulk whenever possible. We compost produce and paper waste even going so far as to sift through the trash before we ship it to the dump to see what can be composted or reused.

As I write this editorial, I'm pleased to report that the resolution has gone well. But as many will point out, my personal no-plastics pledge won't make much of a difference in the health of our nation. As faculty, staff and students within academic communities, we all have the opportunity and responsibility to care for our earth. If photos of



plastic-filled beaches and bird bellies aren't enough to spur action, the toxins consumed by wildlife have entered the food chain (Andrews, 2012) and are posing a threat to human health. Let's work with our sustainability committees (or create one if it doesn't already exist) to address the use of plastics on our campuses. Campus communities can make a substantial impact on plastic usage nationally and it is time to take action! As I stated in one of my earlier editorials, the majority of the world's leaders pass through our academic doors. My University hands them a recyclable water bottle, but there is more to be done. Let's join together to forge a path toward less plastic consumption and healthier academic communities for our faculty, staff, and students while they are on our campuses and motivate members of our communities to create such environments wherever they go.

REFERENCES

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