

Feature Intro

May's Hidden Hometown Hero is biologist, molecular physiologist and The Master GardenerSM certified Lynda Acker, who chats with ONC's Crissy Neville about her role in helping create peaceful, serene natural spaces for healing and restoration here in the Sandhills.

Crissy Neville: You are a co-founder of The Healing Garden at the Clara Mclean House on the campus of FirstHealth Moore Regional Hospital. What is The Healing Garden, and how did you become involved in its creation?

Lynda Acker: The Garden is an essential resource in our community for families dealing with the stress of illness or loss of a loved one. It provides a peaceful destination to those individuals and the public, promoting both healing and wellness. The idea for The Healing Garden first came about when my friend and garden co-founder Cassie Willis' mother was sick in the hospital at FirstHealth Moore Regional. Cassie realized there was nowhere nearby for hospital visitors just to get away and be in nature. After Cassie's mother's death, she moved here, and we began to collaborate on the idea.

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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Greetings and welcome to OutreachNC 2.0! As many readers sit safely at home, hunkered down and doing their part to control the COVID-19 pandemic, we have thought long and hard about how to best continue providing our readers and the community with engaging, educational content. Many of our Aging Outreach Services staff, clients and the caregivers we represent are on the front lines, continuing to provide services and care to our clients. We see first-hand the impact this pandemic is having and the need to create a way forward.

What we've discovered as we take a tactical pause is that sometimes, in foggy moments and uncertain times, the best thing we can do is go home.

For OutreachNC this means returning to our roots, where we began over a decade ago. Before the glossy magazine covers and perfect binding, we had a newsletter, a simple, yet effective way to connect with the community.

With that in mind, we have transitioned OutreachNC Magazine to OutreachNC Newsletter, which gives us flexibility in getting this content to your inboxes, your mailboxes and, when the world reblooms, into the community. The content will remain timely, informative and fun. We'll still be reviewing books, keeping up on the latest health trends, exploring social trends and crossing off our crosswords.

More than ever, we will be connecting with each other, leaning in rather than slowing down.

Together we will weather the storms of 2020 and beyond.

Upward and onward.

Amy J. Nath

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ASK THE EXPERT: STAYING CONNECTED

Kate Pomplun, LMSW, CMC | kate@agingcaresolutionsnc.com

Across the nation as well as the globe, people are coming up with creative ways to stay connected during the Stay at Home mandates. Many of these opportunities include use of technology programs such as FaceTime, Skype, Zoom meetings and even live church services viewable through the internet. These are great ways to feel connected to one's community and friends.

Many of our older adult population are tech savvy enough to benefit from the connecting technology, but what about those who live alone and aren't used to using a computer or smart phone? What about loved ones in facilities that aren't permitted to have visitors? Here are a few creative ideas to stay connected, many of which can also be done via video calling if they are familiar with its use:

If speaking on the phone is an option here are some ideas for more than the basic "what did you do today" conversation:

- Take a few moments prior to making the phone call to think of a reminiscence story from a memory the two of you share. (Ex: that road trip you took and got the flat tire... Or the time your kids set off the smoke alarm cooking you pancakes for your birthday).
- Can you play an instrument? Put the phone on speaker and play something for them.
- Use another device to play their favorite type of music and have a sing-a-long. Bonus: this could even work with residents in facilities with memory loss. Recruit the help of facility staff to make the phone or FaceTime call. Familiar music is extremely therapeutic, especially to those with cognitive/memory impairments. You may be surprised at how many words or parts of a melody to a favorite song they remember.
- Are they a history buff or do they like trivia? Use a trivia game or look up questions on a favorite topic and play over the phone.
- Can they speak a different language? Maybe you've always wanted to learn? Surprise them by learning a few phrases or words and use it in the phone call.

Other ideas:

- In a digital age, hand written letters and cards can be even more meaningful. Take the time to write a letter or send printed photos or an interesting article (preferably about a topic other than the pandemic).
- If you're able to go to the post office, mail a puzzle, book or magazine. Bonus: your local bookshop would likely LOVE your business and may even be able to take an order over the phone and ship to them. Or, maybe an online order of chocolates is the way to help them feel connected.
- Have grandchildren with local grandparents? (Or know of older adults who'd love a visit) Call to arrange a time for them to be outside or on their porch and put on a parade/dance/singing show from a safe distance. Maybe even bring some groceries to leave for them while you're there.

Loneliness and isolation occur frequently with older adults in a variety of settings even when we are not enduring a rollercoaster pandemic. This is a great time to take the opportunity to reach out to them. Recruit other family members and friends to do the same. Most of these tasks don't cost a dime *and* can be continued even when we're no longer required to self-isolate.

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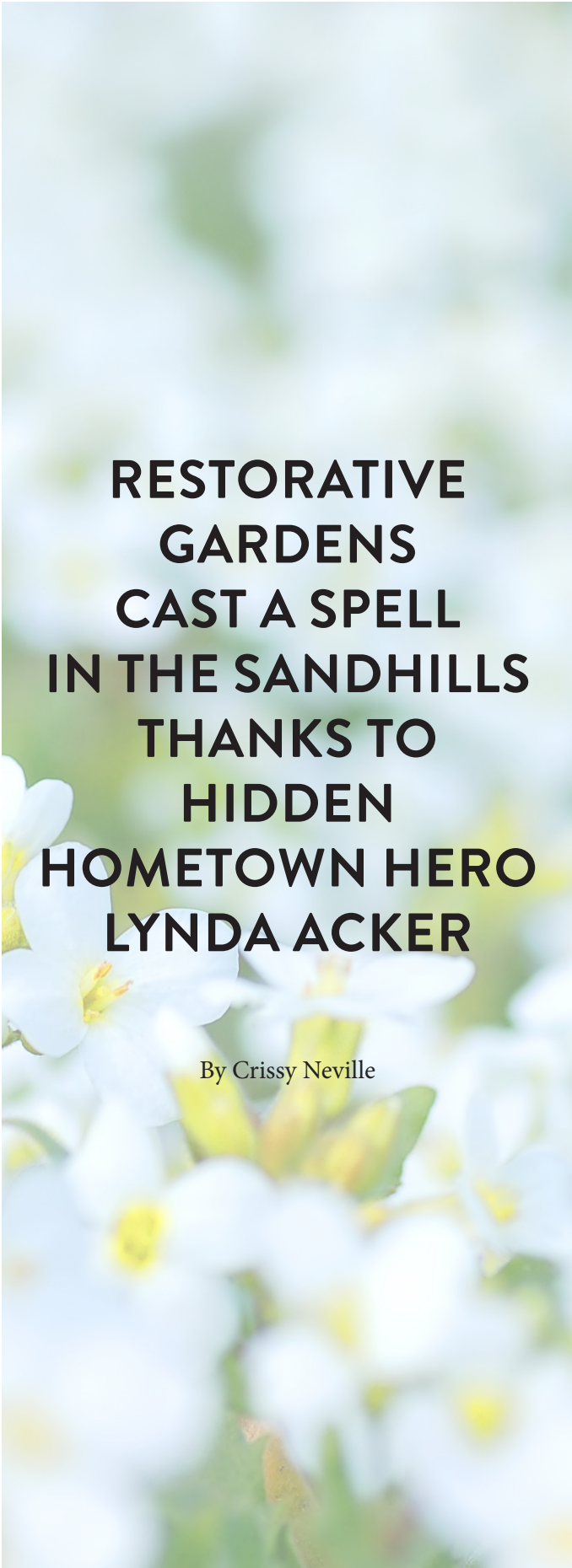


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RESTORATIVE GARDENS CAST A SPELL IN THE SANDHILLS THANKS TO HIDDEN HOMETOWN HERO LYNDA ACKER

By Crissy Neville

CN: What a beautiful idea. Walk me through the Garden, if you will.

LA: It is a classical English garden with many garden rooms, featuring traditional touches but also a bit of whimsy, water, and a lot of color and stonework. Many paths radiate from the center stone-covered dovecote, our Garden shed and volunteer hub, leading visitors to different themed gardens or rooms, each with a slightly different character. Throughout, there is seating for quiet reflection, prayer, or conversation, and of course, beautiful views. We designed the Garden so there is always something interesting to see. Aside from seasonal displays of blossom and color, even in winter, there are grasses, statuary, architectural features, and winter bloomers like hellebores. Each Garden is separated by walls, taller plantings, or vertical aspects that divide each room from the space next door.

The Garden is for anyone in any kind of crisis to go to and experience its peace and solace and is a nature sanctuary for all.

CN: The garden room concept is a unique idea. Describe some of the rooms for our readers, please.

LN: Certainly! There's the cottage garden room, very classically English with spiky foxgloves and espaliered apples. The children's Garden is popular with its life-sized checker set and fairy house border. La Breeza's Bower is the covered pergola, named for the statue of a young girl there with her hands and face stretched upward. Her joyous countenance is lit from above. The water garden has a double waterfall with shade trees and lots of boulders and grasses. Other rooms include the rose, cutting, herb, and wildlife gardens, as well as the lightly hued morning garden and library garden near the Clara McLean House, which is the hospitality and respite home owned by FirstHealth. The house and Garden have separate missions, but with The Healing Garden in the house's backyard, the combination makes a great package.

CN: The Healing Garden is on the same site as the hospitality house, but the other palliative care buildings and The Hospice Gardens were built

elsewhere. You volunteered in that garden installation, too?

LA: Yes, that all came about from 2013-15. It was decided that the FirstHealth Hospice & Palliative Care Center would be built on a separate, more extensive site in West End. The campus sits on a serene, 30-acre plot on what used to be an RV park and today includes the FirstHealth Grief Resource & Counseling Center, Hospice House and administration buildings, a chapel, lake, covered pavilion, and The Hospice Gardens that landscape designer and then Healing Garden volunteer Sally DeWinkleer and I designed. The Hospice Gardens are quite different from The Healing Garden — expansive, unstructured, and wild, filled with trees, shrubs, and native plants.

CN: Tell me about the design concept of The Hospice Gardens.

LA: Since the Hospice buildings and lake were already located on the site, we wanted to incorporate the Gardens into what already worked well. In observation, Sally noticed that the Hospice employees would walk across the grass instead of using the sidewalks in traversing between the Hospice House and the admin buildings, so we placed a peaceful water feature along their usual path. There was also a preexisting wooded area, so we turned that into a woodland garden with understory plants, deer resistant perennials, and native grasses, then interplanted with some 5,000 naturalizing daffodil bulbs. We added benches and stone tables for seating. An open area became a labyrinth, surrounded by a crape myrtle alley. The labyrinth represents the inward and outward journeys associated with Hospice care. Pathways gravitate outward from a centralized pavilion toward the lake, and in other directions. Patients staying at the Hospice House, their families, and the center's employees all use and enjoy The Hospice Gardens.

CN: A great deal of thought has gone into creating these gardens for healing and wellness benefits. How do gardening and nature help one's health?

LA: There is a lot of empirical evidence showing the relationship between nature and health. Just being outside or viewing nature has been shown to reduce stress levels, shorten hospital stays, hasten healing, and result in more beneficial medical outcomes. Nature can be a healing force for caregivers, too, in that it takes them away from the day-to-day stressors of caring for a sick loved one.

CN: What's next for you, Lynda, and how else do you champion nature and gardening?

LA: I am from a place synonymous with lifelong learning and environmental education, the community of Chautauqua Institution in New York state. My family and I return to my home area each summer so I can coordinate the Monarch Moments and More program. I also hand raise and release hundreds of Monarch butterflies in New York and here in North Carolina each summer and fall. Along with my friend Beth Stevens, I brought this effort to Pinehurst with the establishment of The Native Pollinator Garden in the Pinehurst Arboretum and Flutterby Festival. I'm currently designing gardens or consulting on projects for Friend to Friend, the Boys & Girls Club of the Sandhills, The O'Neal School, the Southern Pines Garden Club, Sandhills Community College, and my work at The Healing Garden continues with the advent of the *Bloom!* educational series, and more. I recently launched Lynda Acker Garden Design for professional practice. Throughout it all, I am very passionate about nature and the natural world and feel it is an honor to be able to pass that passion along to others.

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Margaret Lorenz "Mia"

Attorney at Law

MLorenz@LorenzCreedLaw.com



- Mia Lorenz is an experienced attorney whose 25-year record of service in the law demonstrates her commitment to her clients and community.
- She is passionate about assisting clients in their quest to maintain control and dignity as they age and/or experience illness, as well as plan to preserve assets while maintaining care.
- Active in the community as legal advisor to NAMI Moore County, AOS & Friends Care, Inc. and Linden Lodge.

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Who doesn't love multipurpose flowers?!
With so many reasons to take extra special care of ourselves, why not add some beauty to our lives as well? Special bonus, these flowering herbs are especially popular with another important creature: the honeybee. Check out these lovely additions to any herb garden.



THYME

Thyme blooms are an excellent nectar source, providing enough food to produce 150 pounds of honey per acre. For your own health, thyme can treat bacterial and fungal infections and is a go-to treatment for coughs and congestion.

OREGANO

Anti-fungal and anti-microbial properties mean that oregano is useful in treating a whole host of different illnesses. It's also commonly used to treat respiratory issues. It is almost no maintenance and it takes over large patches of land as a low growing ground cover. In the late summer and fall, the ground will be covered with these flowers that the bees actively seek out as a prime food source.



ECHINACEA

Well known as an immune stimulant for humans, it may also work to stimulate the immune systems of animals and insects. There's not a lot of research in this area, but the bees love a good echinacea patch. It's a hardy perennial, and once planted it spreads itself and produces huge crops of blooms to feed the bees. Whether it actually helps them in any medicinal way, it's still an important food source. Echinacea is a perennial, and once established you'll have a dense patch of bee food ready to eat.



CHAMOMILE

If honeybees need a little extra help to make it through to the next summer, feeding them a chamomile-infused sugar syrup is the next best thing to actual honey. The herbs help provide trace amounts of pollen for nutrients, and chamomile, in particular, is chosen because it's said to have the most pleasing flavor to the bees. This pleasing flavor is often an ingredient in teas for humans, used for treating anxiety and stress.



Please consult your physician before consuming ANY herbs medicinally.

GRAY MATTER GAMES

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ACROSS

1. Stickers
6. Soccer ____
10. Beanies
14. ____ squash
15. Husk
16. "O" in old radio lingo
17. Across the nation
19. Fall follower
20. Distribution of Linux
21. Eccentric
22. Chinese dynasty
23. Fairy tale character
25. Crush
26. Andy's radio partner
30. To make fuller or more complete
32. To orbit a point
35. Dispute
39. Bologna home
40. Sacred beetle of ancient Egypt
41. Set the boundaries of
43. Sights
44. Indicate
46. Ballet move

47. Flip, in a way
50. Certain tribute
53. ____ du jour
54. "Tarzan" extra
55. Officers
60. Bit
61. Relating to machinery
63. "____ does it!"
64. Jewish month
65. Grottos
66. All there
67. Brewer's need
68. Taste, e.g.

DOWN

1. Boston or Chicago, e.g.
2. Palm berry
3. Decomposes
4. Cantab, for one
5. Belt
6. Big mouth
7. Brooks Robinson, e.g.
8. Common expression across instruments
9. Coaster
10. A common rabbit

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53						54			55		56	57	58	59
60						61			62					
63						64				65				
66						67				68				

11. Dislike, and then some
12. Theme of this puzzle
13. Bulrush, e.g.
18. "____ any drop to drink": Coleridge
24. "____ to Billie Joe"
25. Beginning of a conclusion
26. Bone-dry
27. Allocate, with "out"
28. Elliptical
29. Not liquid or gas
31. Ask
33. British sailor (slang)
34. Conceited
36. Coastal raptor
37. "Roots," e.g.
38. Cookbook abbr.

42. Sink
43. Caribbean, e.g.
45. Work boot feature
47. Cheeky and bold
48. ____ Bowl
49. "Paradise Lost" character
51. Marienbad, for one
52. Hammer's partner
54. Asian nurse
56. Euros replaced them
57. Clickable image
58. Be-boppers
59. "... or ____!"
62. "48____"

Eat Right: Tips to Manage Stress

Callie Yakubisin, RD, LDN | cyakubisin@thedairyalliance.com

These past few months have been uncharted territory for most of us. Experiencing stress and anxiety is natural, but the effects of hormones that accompany stress, along with too much free time, can make us vulnerable to overeating. Follow these tips to help overeating during times of increased stress:

- **Eat small meals throughout the day.** A consistent meal pattern helps to stabilize blood sugar and prevent binge eating that often happens when you skip meals. Refer to the USDA MyPlate and choose whole grains, such as oatmeal & whole wheat pasta, low-fat dairy foods, including milk, yogurt, & cheese, fruits and vegetables, and lean proteins.
- **Do your best.** Forgive yourself to avoid the additional stress that can come with trying to follow a “perfect diet.” It’s okay to indulge in cravings occasionally - just remember to practice moderation.
- **Get creative in the kitchen.** Mastering new healthy recipes or “better for you” variations of your favorite comfort foods can keep you occupied and tap into your creativity. Check out our recipe for a Greek Chicken Wrap on the following page to get you started.

- **Stay active.** If circumstances allow, try yoga or take daily walks. Take deep breaths and use this time to reflect and meditate. Exercise helps release endorphins, which are famous for making us feel good.
- **Get enough sleep.** Many of the hormones that affect our appetite are influenced by sleep. Create calm at bedtime by putting away your phone and turning off the news. Limit caffeine and alcohol prior to bedtime, as well.
- **Snack smart.** Choose snacks that provide sustained energy. Aim for healthy snacks that provide vitamins and minerals, including those many Americans are missing in their diets- calcium, potassium, vitamin D and fiber. Pair Greek yogurt with fruit, cheese with whole grain crackers, or milk with trail mix for a snack that provides high quality protein and carbohydrates, to replenish energy and sustain you until the next meal.

Stress is a natural part of life. Creating habits, like eating a well-balanced diet, exercising regularly and getting adequate sleep, can help us better navigate through stressful times and stay healthy while we do it.



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Greek Chicken Wrap with Tzatziki Herb Yogurt Sauce

Prep Time: 30 minutes **Cook Time:** 11 minutes

Total Time: 41 minutes **Servings:** 4

INGREDIENTS

Sauce

- 2 cups plain yogurt
- 1 cup peeled seeded and diced cucumber
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon white vinegar
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1/4 teaspoon salt (optional)

Wrap

- 1 (6-ounce) boneless skinless chicken breast
- 1 tablespoon light Italian dressing
- 4 (6-inch) whole-wheat pitas
- 2 cups chopped romaine lettuce
- 1 medium tomato chopped
- 1/2 cup sliced red onion
- 1/4 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 4 kalamata or black olives, pitted and sliced

Instructions

1. To prepare sauce, combine yogurt and next five ingredients, stirring to blend. Add salt if desired (sauce may be made up to 2 hours in advance). Cover and refrigerate until serving.
2. To prepare wraps, place chicken breast in a heavy-duty plastic bag and add Italian dressing.

Marinate 15 minutes. Pound chicken (using a meat pounder, mallet or the bottom of a skillet) and flatten to about 1/2-inch thickness. Remove chicken from bag.

3. Cook chicken breast in a large non-stick skillet over medium heat 5 minutes per side or until lightly browned and cooked through. Place chicken on a cutting board and slice thinly against the grain; set aside.

4. Heat pitas in microwave oven 30 seconds. Place one pita on a plate and top with 1/2 cup lettuce and one-fourth of the chicken slices. Sprinkle one-fourth of tomato, onion, feta cheese and olives on top of chicken. Spoon some of the sauce over top and fold in edges of pita. Wrap sandwich in parchment or waxed paper for plating and serving. Repeat with remaining pitas. Serve immediately with additional sauce on the side.




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6	9	1	5	8	3	2	7	4
4	5	8	7	9	2	6	1	3
8	3	6	9	2	4	1	5	7
2	1	9	8	5	7	4	3	6
7	4	5	3	1	6	8	9	2

Faith: Assurance in Anxious Times

The Rev. Colette Bachand | cwood@penickvillage1964.org

At the end of a somewhat anxious day recently, rather than going home, I drove to the garden center.

I knew exactly what I needed to do to ward off anxiety: I needed to start my herb garden! I bought some new containers, fresh potting soil, basil, parsley, dill, tarragon and yes, rosemary, *of course rosemary*.

Inhaling the smell of rosemary, I felt a sense assurance. I'm not sure what I was being assured of, but I think it had something to do with the assurance that in uncertain times, rosemary still smells like rosemary.

It occurs to me that gardens have a way of doing that: *assuring us*. Planting, growing, pruning and seeing things come up year after year assures us we exist in cycles of death and new growth, time after time after time. Gardens remind us that God has promised there would always be tomorrow and the fact that rosemary still smells like rosemary, no matter how uncertain or changeable the world is; rosemary's aroma comforts us in knowing that some things never change.

No matter what else is going on, weeds will still fight to overtake our flowerbeds and I guarantee you, pine needles still cover our front lawns next. No matter what else is happening in the world, God has promised to be with us and love us and watching my

blueberry bushes start to bloom last month, I was keenly aware that God has kept God's promise.

The best part about experiencing God's faithfulness in nature is that you don't have to be digging in your back yard, turning over soil and lugging fresh dirt around to experience it. Especially when aging knees might not cooperate with getting up and down or achy backs don't agree with shoveling, our gardens can take different forms like succulents on a window shelf, flowers arranged on a table, or the view of a flowering tree from a favorite chair.

The success of a garden isn't measured by the amount of dirt under our fingernails, but rather, measured by how much it reminds us that some things are unchangeable. God is always present.

Spring always comes. Life is renewed.

And God's faithfulness is poured out in zinnias, sunflowers and bright tomatoes.

Gardening is a spiritual practice. It is where we plant hope and courage; it is where we connect with a greater good; it is where we allow God to grow something new in our hearts, at any age, no matter what is going on in the world. Maybe that is why when our hearts are troubled we find God in our gardens – like God, gardens renew, heal and nurture.

So go ahead, grab some rosemary and take a big inhale. All shall be well.



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Brain Health: Synaptic Pruning in the Brain

Jenna Renfro, Ph.D., ABPP Pinehurst Neuropsychology | 910-420-8041

The brain is a complex and fascinating organ. It is estimated that the brain is made up of somewhere near 100 billion neurons, the specialized cells that make up the brain. Furthermore, because each of these cells forms multiple connections with other cells, just like a complex highway system, it is estimated that there are anywhere between 100 and 1,000 trillion brain connections or “synapses.” The brain synapse is the connection point for cross-communication from one cell to another in the brain, with the support of neurotransmitters, the chemicals released from one cell to another in order to “communicate” -- chemicals like serotonin, dopamine, and acetylcholine. A compound called myelin acts as insulation that quickens the speed of the message from one neuron to the other by way of a long track or cable, otherwise known as an axon. Glial cells are the supporting actors to neurons in the brain, helping to provide structural support and enhance the function of brain cells.

Interestingly, glial cells act like gardeners in the brain, through a neurodevelopmental process called “synaptic pruning.”

Yes, in the same way that the gardener prunes a fig tree, the brain actually has a way of “pruning” itself through these intricate molecules that scientists are still trying to understand. Synaptic pruning refers to the process by which unused or unnecessary synaptic connections are eliminated. This process serves to make the existing and necessary connections more efficient, a way of increasing the signal to noise ratio in the brain. Removing excess synapses enables more clear and effective communication between brain cells.

Synaptic pruning is extremely important in the process of neurodevelopment from the moment a baby exits the womb - maybe even before. Infants are born with far more connections in the brain than are necessary and the number of connections increase in the early months of post-partum

infanthood, a process referred to as “blooming.” During blooming, the brain produces more connections than are used or necessary.

As the baby learns and receives an overwhelming amount of input from its external environment, the process of synaptic pruning takes over. Pruning begins to carve out the most important brain connections and creates circuits in the brain for various functions like learning how to reach for objects or say their first word. Through the pruning process, the brain becomes more refined and organized and, over time, new skills are developed. It adapts to its environment through sensory input, movement, and learning.

Certain neurological or psychiatric disorders are thought to be related to faulty or disrupted pruning in the brain. In some situations, the brain does not prune “enough” which is thought to be related to the development of Autism and Autistic spectrum disorders. Remember, pruning helps to remove unnecessary connections and signals in the brain to reduce “noise,” so a lack of pruning leads to increased “noise” and potential sensory sensitivity, as in the case of Autism

BRIGHT IDEAS



**BRIGHT IDEAS PROGRAM
— 2020 —**

Teachers in K-12 classrooms are encouraged to apply for a grant up to \$2,000 for the **2020-2021** school year. Grants are available for all subjects and teachers can apply individually or as a team.

This year, Central Electric will award Bright Ideas grants totaling approximately \$15,000 to local educators.

The final deadline for all grant applications is **Sept. 15**. For more information or to submit an application, visit NCBrightIdeas.com or contact Central Electric's Bright Idea's coordinator, **Ryley Osentoski**, at 919-708-1639

For more information or to submit an application, visit NCBrightIdeas.com.




ONC BOOK CLUB



This month we're a bit behind. We've been reading other things (like news reports and Facebook memes), but with the downtime suddenly upon us, we got back to our book list and re-visited Lori Gottlieb's *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone: A Therapist, HER Therapist and our Lives Revealed*.

It seems strangely appropriate, this title, for the moment we're in. There is instability, uncertainty and a lot of questions for which we have few answers, so reading about Gottlieb's own life crisis and those of her patients felt almost soothing, in a sort of we're-in-it-together sort of way that reminded us we had problems, we have problems, and we will go on (into the future) with still more problems. We also have beauty, life, answers, questions, solutions and moments of sheer terror interspersed throughout all of it.

Though the 'problems' Gottlieb and her clients address in the book may seem small compared with what we face in a global pandemic, the role of therapy and the ways in which we address our life circumstances remain constant, and this book addresses the role of therapy, how it 'works,' why it sometimes doesn't work and how we can make the most of the challenges in our lives to thrive instead of simply survive.

Jeeves gives it 3.5 paws, noting there is some unsavory language, and he didn't always sympathize with Gottlieb personally. Still, he argues, there is merit here.

We'd love to hear your thoughts and reactions to *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone*, particularly during a time when, well, maybe we all need to talk to someone.

related disorders. Childhood epilepsy, or seizure disorders, are thought to be related to a lack of pruning in certain areas (like the temporal lobe, a common seizure site) which results in excess neuronal activity triggering a seizure. In contrast, another situation that can arise is "over" pruning, or pruning too much and removing too many connections, which is thought to be related to the development of schizophrenia.

So how do we tend the garden of the brain? Pruning is just one example of how our brains are dynamic and "plastic." Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. Neuroplasticity allows the neurons in the brain to compensate for injury and disease and to adjust their activities in response to new situations or to changes in their environment. In other words, the best way we can help garden our own brains, is with environmental stimulation. A rich environment, full of opportunities for learning and exploration, creates a thriving garden in the brain. Animal research shows that mice who are in an enriched cage with other mice, mazes, and exercise wheels have brains that develop and age more robustly than those who are in an isolated or deprived environment.

Physical exercise is one of the most robust triggers for neuroplasticity. Exercise, especially aerobic exercise, causes a physiological cascade where neurotrophic factors (growth factors) are released into the blood-stream and act like "fertilizer" in the brain. This fertilizer (compounds such as brain-derived neurotrophic factor) creates new synapses or connections in the brain and can grow new brain cells. Neurogenesis (the production of new brain cells) especially occurs in the hippocampus, the structure in the brain responsible for making new memory and is the first area to be affected by Alzheimer's disease.

So how will you tend the garden of your mind? The brain has its own mechanisms built in to respond to its environment and its owner - you - by way of learning, enrichment, physical, cognitive, and social stimulation. To thrive, a garden must be actively maintained. As it turns out, your brain is no different.

Veterans Corner: Disability Benefits Questionnaires

Jim Pedersen, VSO & Director of Moore County Veterans Service Office | 910-947-3257

Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs)

are standardized forms clinicians use during a Veterans Administration Compensation and Pension (C&P) exam to gather medical information about a veteran's disability. Claims raters use the results from the DBQ to decide the claim.

DBQs were introduced in 2010 to standardize the capture of information during VA exams and as an alternative for veterans to take to their treating physicians, particularly if they were living overseas or in rural areas where getting a VA exam was more difficult. In March, the VA stopped accepting DBQs from private physicians. There are several reasons for the change.

The VA has modernized and is updating exam criteria and the corresponding DBQ for each acknowledged disability. DBQs are available to VA examiners internally immediately after they are updated, but public-facing DBQs required a lengthy approval process before they are available for use. The VA will not accept an outdated form. Veterans who submit DBQs from their private doctor on outdated forms will be scheduled for a VA exam so that a new DBQ can be prepared.

The VA has expanded its ability to conduct C&P exams by contracting with three primary vendors to provide exams in places other than traditional VA Medical Centers and Outpatient Clinics. The contracted clinicians can provide wider coverage, especially in rural areas, in federal and state prison facilities and in over 33 countries overseas where the VA does not have a presence.

The VA is safeguarding against fraud. In the past few years, the VA has seen a growing industry of individuals and companies marketing the service of completing DBQs for Veterans.

Some have provided honest, valuable service to veterans. However, the VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has received hundreds of reports of individuals and companies who are engaged in questionable, even fraudulent, practices that include charging high prices for completing DBQs or submitting DBQs with findings that are vastly different than the other evidence in the Veteran's claims folder. Also, it is a requirement that DBQs submitted by a private provider must be based on an exam conducted in person. VA's OIG recently issued an audit report about providers who were completing DBQs for veterans remotely and recommended that VA revisit its practice of making public-facing DBQs available.

For veterans who have ongoing disability claims, the VA will continue to accept any private treatment medical records the veteran or his/her accredited representative submits in support of a claim. It is important that veterans also attend the C&P exams scheduled for their claim. Once the VA receives all the evidence, claims processors review and weigh everything as part of the decision-making process.

The VA Regional Office in Winston-Salem has issued a statement encouraging all veterans to work with an accredited organization for assistance in completing claims for VA benefits. The accredited representative can guide the veteran in submitting applicable medical records for the claim.

Nearly all of North Carolina's counties have a Veterans Service office staffed by accredited Veterans Service Officers. The Moore County Veterans Service Office, located at 910-947-3257, is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday to assist Moore County veterans and their families.

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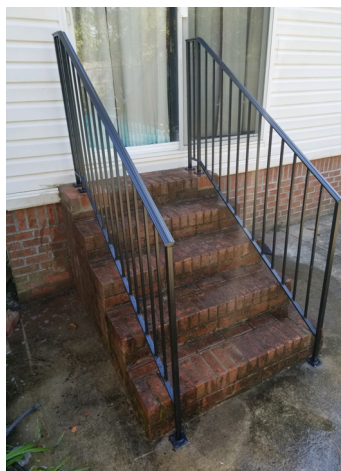
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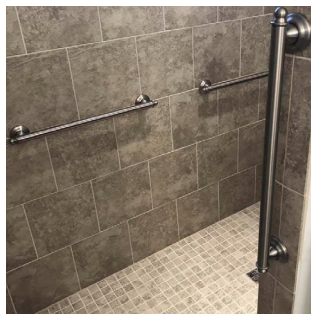
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