Dear NECHA Community,

As this is my first letter as President of NECHA, I would like to start with a huge thank you to Tanya Sullivan, DNP, APRN, CNP, as she led us through the challenges we faced as a community last year. Her calm and hopeful leadership was instrumental as we looked to engage our membership and determined how and if we could make our annual meeting a reality. Additionally, the planning committee was wonderful in their ability to seek out proposals, review them, and help put together a set of offerings that addressed many of the current challenges that our students and colleagues in college health are facing at this time. The experience was enriching and even provided a sense of relief by being able to think and learn about other things aside from what has colored much of what this past year has been about – COVID-19.

I’m struck by the reality that we are at the tail end of 2021 and finishing up the first semester of this academic year. As the common saying states, “Where did time go?” Many recent conversations I have had with colleagues often start with some version of “How are you doing?” or “How are things on your campus?” and I think the genuine concern and frequency of these questions gives us a sense of how our time has been spent... time has been spent by supporting each other and our communities, doing arduous work in circumstances that many of us did not expect. We needed to be as creative and resourceful as we have ever been, and have also needed to reach out for help across our campuses, and beyond. We continue to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, while addressing issues of social justice in our world, and continuing to support the increasing needs in our students’ mental or emotional health. While time flies when we’re having fun, time also flies when we are dedicated to the service of others and each other.

Perhaps this other-centered perspective is what has given energy to many of us in our careers – the possibility of being in the service our patients, client, students, our staff and our colleagues; and being able to make a positive change in our world. At the same time, we are all in the middle of this storm and if we listen attentively, it’s easy to hear how our energies have been eroded at times as well. So then the question is, how do we keep going? As a close colleague mentioned in this recent time, we need to “keep your oars in the water.” Yes, this trip is not a sprint, but a long marathon – one that keeps surprising us, and one in which we need to be adaptive and find ways to continue on.

What is also true is that none of us, our teams, or our campuses are going through this alone. I believe that this is a clue that can help us “keep our oars the water” – the realization that we are not alone, and a collective sense of belonging. Belonging to our teams, to our campuses, to our professional fields, to the world of higher education... and yes, our NECHA Community. While isolation can bring despair, belonging can bring hope and possibility. I have experienced this shift from isolation/despair to belonging/hope in multiple settings – in my personal life, as a patient, as a clinician, a supervisee, supervisor and administrator. I recognize that while isolation is certainly a given of our Existence and Being, the possibility of relationship is also co-occurring and can make all the difference.
So with this sentiment of hopeful connection and belonging, I want to thank you for being part of our NECHA Community and also invite you to continue being involved. We had a wonderful annual meeting and many of you participated by presenting or facilitating sessions. Also, I am so grateful to this year’s Board of Directors. At the start of the conference we were concerned about having enough people serve and by the end of the election, we had a full Board with 6 Members-at-Large! I am so appreciative for each Board member’s “yes” to serve our community and hope you continue thinking about how you can share your gifts with our NECHA Community over the next year.

As we start planning for next year’s conference in Newport, RI, on October 26-28, 2022, please save the date and share it with your colleagues! Leah Berkenwald, MA, our President-Elect, is in the planning stages of this project, and if you would like to get involved, please contact her at leahb@brandeis.edu.

Looking ahead to the next couple of months, I hope you are able to find some time for respite between semesters. If you observe any of the holidays of the season, I hope you have been able to celebrate the hope and resilience represented in them, and may 2022 be full of possibilities and opportunities for you personally and professionally.

Take care and stay connected!

Felix