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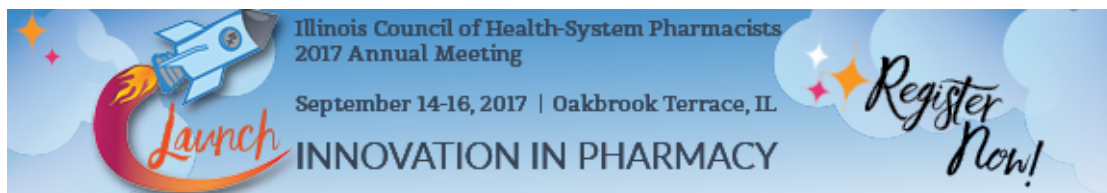
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Presidents Message Lessons from La Soufrière

by Charlene Hope, PharmD, MS, BCPS, ICHP President

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After what seemed like forever since my last vacation, I finally embarked on a long awaited vacation down to the Caribbean to the island of Saint Vincent the Grenadines (SVG). For those of you that are avid cruise travelers or have vacationed in this region, this small island is located south of Puerto Rico, west of Barbados and not too far north of Venezuela. Both my parents and husband, Wismore, were born in Saint Vincent, so this vacation was particularly special since it was in part a homecoming for my husband.

While most of my previous trips to SVG were taken with my parents, those visits primarily consisted of visiting numerous family members and attending any family events that happened to be occurring during the time of our visit. There was often very little time for sight-seeing or experiencing the island as a tourist. This trip was different; it was the first one I had taken without my parents, and Wismore was determined for us to balance our time between visiting family and experiencing the island as tourists.

The highlight of my trip occurred on the last day of my vacation, and for me a lifetime experience on my bucket list – hiking to the top of La Soufrière, the active volcano on the northern most part of the island. Other than what I had heard from other family members or friends about their experiences hiking the volcano, I really did not know what I was getting myself into, but I was finally ready to embark on this experience. During the journey, I found myself thinking about some life lessons that I thought would be fun to share in this month's message.

In addition to my husband, we had a good friend of his, Morris, who I would describe as a “mountain man” who had climbed La Soufriere many times and often served as a guide. As we ascended the volcano, Morris led, I followed, and my husband followed behind me. The first leg of the hike was the warm-up. It was a manageable path – clear, defined, and well-worn with stairs created from long pieces of bamboo. During this part of the journey, Morris would continue to tell us repeatedly, “Take your time, one step at a time” – perhaps in an attempt to pace ourselves for the journey ahead.

The lower part of the volcano was all rain forest – beautiful, but also quite hot and humid. At the end of the first leg, we were rewarded with a short break, a moment to sit and recharge on big bold rock formations called the dry river. We then started on the second leg of the hike and what I thought would be the toughest part of the journey...which it was. As we continued to climb and work our way up the elevation, Morris, maybe sensing that energy was waning, said, “nothing good comes without work.” While simply stated, the words resonated with me and provided me with the mental motivation to keep on going.

As we continued along on the journey, Morris would continue to share words of encouragement and stories to distract the mind. At one point, I was struggling physically with the climb and Wismore offered to carry by backpack to lessen my load so I could go longer before having to stop to catch my breath. This led me to think about any challenge or difficult journey we may be going through in life at home or at work – that the journey becomes a little bit easier with a guide or mentor encouraging you along the way and a family member, friend, partner or colleague that has your back when you really don't think you can take another step. The second part of the hike quickly transitioned into the last ascent. The covered shed and bench that we had been making our way toward had been removed. Now we had nowhere to sit and rest!

The last leg and final ascent of the hike was totally different than the first leg. The plants and vegetation were different, the temperature dropped drastically, and there were no defined, well-worn paths – just rocks and plants. And on this particular day, there was a lot of mist and fog, and the wind was brisk. While I was being told we were almost there and it was not much longer, looking up into the fog there literally seemed like there was no end in sight.

We finally arrived at the top of crater and looked over. As I quickly reached to get my camera, it was gone. The crater had filled with mist. I guess on foggy days this usually happens, but if we waited a few minutes, the mist would shift and we would get a better view. As I stood around waiting for the mist to clear, I thought about another good lesson. Even though you reach the end of your journey or challenge, you may still need to wait for the good result or outcome. The end of the journey does not always guarantee that you will be rewarded right away. Sometimes you may need to take a rest and wait for good stuff to appear.

I was never so happy to start the journey back down the volcano. Certainly going down would be easier than climbing up? No, not so much. It was just as hard, especially now that we were starting the journey on loose rocks and that every step needed to be taken with care as to not to slip, trip or slide. Once back on the hiking trail, it was little easier and not very friendly to knees and thighs, but I powered through. The great part about the return hike was having a sense of direction, of where I just passed hours before and knowing if I kept up the pace and powered through back to where I started, I would be rewarded with a big long bench that I could collapse onto until our ride arrived to take us back home.

While this is not a typical KeePosted article, we all experience challenges and embark on journeys not only in our personal lives but at work as well. Whether you are a little “I” leader or big “L” leader, I hope one or more of these lessons resonate with you and provide you some gentle encouragement on any journey you may be on.

Lessons from La Soufrière

- Take your time, one step at time.
- Nothing good comes without work.
- Life challenges may be more tolerable when accompanied by a sage guide leading you and someone who has got your back.
- Rewards at the end of a grueling journey are not guaranteed, so take that time to rest, be patient, and the good stuff will eventually appear.