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***Thoughts from Staff College.....the fifteenth in our series of Faculty blogs***

**Choices**

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As winter draws in, and you leave for work and arrive home in the darkness, and we come to the end of the second national lockdown, things feel very different from the first, earlier in the year.

This time the roads are a lot busier, the streets are busier, we are busier - but a different type of busy. To be honest, it does not feel like a lockdown this time around. Which made me think: why?

I think it has to do with the personal choices people are making. Choices like: how honest they are when they book in for surgery and are asked how strictly they have self-isolated. Choices about whether they bother to fully understand the consequences of this and the risk of an outbreak. Choices about thinking through the impact of putting NHS staff at risk, not just because they may infect them, but because of the effect of self-isolation of the staff who have been in contact, which could wipe out a whole service. Choices about recognising the impact of their choices on other patients as a result.

I then think, 'well, I have little control of other people's choices, but I do ultimately have control of the choices I make'. It has been a long year and I notice that I, like many people around me, good people, are tired. I notice my fuse is shorter, my tolerance of what I sense as 'stupidity' is less. I have become more self-aware of my change in behaviour, and am curious – why? Have I become a sponge of other people's stress, tiredness and irritation? Then I remember the conditions for a dialogic conversation: 'have an open mind to find more generous ways of communicating':

Suspend Judgement – be aware of my choices.

Suspend assumptions – apprehend the meaning of others.

Suspend impulses – stop behaviours triggered by perceptions which could be wrong.

- Be more grounded
- Clarify my intentions
- Deepen my listening
- Make it safe for different views
- Dare myself and others to suspend judgement

Contemplating this has helped me, and I have shared it with others – it is amazing how things change when you attend to the 'outside' by what you sense from the 'inside'.

So, second 'lockdown' has ended, and a newer, stricter tier system comes into operation, with a break for Christmas. I wonder what choices my fellow citizens will make with regard to the new rules? I also wonder what the 3rd lockdown will feel like!

I will end with a quote from Albus Dumbledore from Harry Potter's second book: 'The Chamber of Secrets': "it is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."

I wonder what choices you will make over the coming months that may well have a huge impact on you and those you love and care for.