

► **DirecTalk** MUSINGS FROM THE 10TH FLOOR

David Dyjack, DrPH, CIH

A Season of Discontent

Tumeric root, freshly grated ginger, full-fat coconut milk, and a dollop of Mānuka honey heated on the stovetop make for a glorious and healthy breakfast beverage. Golden milk is admired in many eastern cultures for its health promoting attributes, one I enjoy in my quiet time before the day begins in earnest. There is one, almost incongruent, ingredient I blend into the beverage: a grind or two of black pepper. Black pepper possesses its own antioxidant phytochemical piperine, which increases bio-availability of other nutrients. Piperine is also known for its ability to stimulate cells to absorb and retain nutrients from food. Clearly, black pepper can play an important role in an effective digestive system.

Black pepper is more commonly known as a mucous membrane irritant. Edge your nose close to freshly ground peppercorns and you'll immediately appreciate these qualities. As a metaphor for quality improvement, we are nudging NEHA into the black pepper phase of our evolution. Tonight, as I scan the news, there is massive flooding in Lynchburg, Virginia. The California Carr Fire has devoured 130,000 acres and taken several lives. Marshalltown, Iowa, is recovering from a massive tornado. A red tide in southwest Florida is in its ninth month and is harming fisheries and wildlife, as well as ruining family holidays. An alarming drought is lingering throughout the southwestern U.S. The earth is speaking to us, it's time for action.

NEHA is doing what it can within its means to minimize its impact on the environment. Our current office building is Energy Star

*Collective action,
new thinking,
and leadership
are in order.*

compliant, and when our lease ends, we are looking to relocate into new digs. We have already explored at least one potential new site. The promising prospect is a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified building. LEED is an internationally recognized green building certification system providing third-party verification that a building was designed and built using strategies aimed at improving performance: less energy, greater water efficiency, reduced carbon dioxide emissions, improved indoor environmental quality, and stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts.

We have taken other steps to reduce our carbon footprint. NEHA staff are encouraged to walk, bike, or take public transportation whenever possible. I walk. NEHA has also implemented a telework policy that further reduces our carbon footprint. We have taken steps to reduce unnecessary consumption of natural resources. We are actively planning to take the organization into the paperless era. Our incoming faxes are now digitized without the need to be printed. These faxes are securely forwarded to the intended recipi-

ent. Our credentialing department is working diligently to go paperless. Our Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition is largely paperless. I'm pleased to report that 77% of this year's attendees actively used the conference app, which reduces the need for paper programs. Furthermore, we are increasingly negotiating with our conference hotels to serve locally grown food at our meal functions and to provide vegetarian options.

This year we partnered with ecoAmerica to support climate initiatives in Franklin County, Ohio; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Salt Lake County, Utah. We hope to expand that effort soon with support from federal and other sources.

The NEHA board of directors is also providing national leadership. We have divested ourselves of tobacco stocks and I will urge the board to support a climate for health declaration by committing us to work towards 100% clean energy by 2030, in part by purging our investment portfolio of fossil fuels. Why is that important? We need to lead collective action across the country, provide new thinking, and above all else, be leaders in this important effort. Let's do our part to promote clean energy, avoid costly carbon pollution from dirty fuels, and provide choices in affordable energy. These efforts should improve people's health and help to build a shared and sustainable prosperity. At the same time, we can assist our communities to be better prepared for the kinds of floods, fires, and droughts we are currently experiencing. Finally, our efforts should involve all Americans. All of us must have a say in decisions that

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affect our lives. Special efforts should be made to include youth and vulnerable communities in crafting solutions and setting policy.

You will be hearing more from me in the future about a roadmap to clean energy. I feel the need to lead by example through not only walking more and taking public transportation but also eating lower on the food chain (i.e., eating more locally grown and in season fruits and vegetables, as well as less meat and meat products). This endeavor is coming from a guy whose comfort foods are sausage and eggs, salami sandwiches made with white bread drowning in yellow mustard, and slow-cooked barbeque pork ribs.

It's now my time to personify black pepper. Irritating but essential to good health. Our nation and planet are increasingly under water, under a cloud of smoke, and generally under sustained stress. I recognize some of us do not believe that humans have an appreciable impact on climate. I acknowledge that



Golden milk. Photo courtesy of David Dyjack.

it is politically disadvantageous to talk about this subject or work in this space because of local politics. I ask that you lead in any way possible given your local set of conditions.

Over the next few years I plan to stay on message, possibly to the point of irritation. NEHA members should be perceived by our

communities as leaders in the national climate conversation. We should live our lives in a manner that demonstrates our individual commitment to reducing our carbon footprint. Collectively, all 7,000 of our members working in concert can make a difference in solving this crisis.

I end with a story. About one year ago, Georgetown, Texas, became the first city in Texas to operate solely on renewable energy. The city's mayor was quoted as saying, "We have a moral and ethical obligation to leave the earth better than we found it." Georgetown is a conservative town in a conservative state. I intend to learn more about Georgetown and its journey to renewable energy. Was it nature or nurture? Was it economics or ecology? I applaud Georgetown and those following in its footsteps.

It's getting late and there is ginger to grate in a few hours. 🐻

Dave

ddyjack@neha.org
Twitter: @DTDyjack

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