

Adrienne Wald Strong Medicine interview 3-18-2014

[00:00]

A: -- participate in this project.

Q: You're welcome.

A: It's very important work even though it's not easy to talk about necessarily.

Q: Yeah, that's why I got involved too. So my intro, this is Joan Ilacqua and today is March 18th, right? Right. And I am here with Dr. Adrienne Wald in the UMass Boston Science Building. We're going to record an interview as part of the Strong Medicine Oral History Project. And Dr. Wald, do I have your permission to record this interview?

A: Yes, you do.

Q: Excellent. So our first set of questions are basically background questions and if you could just begin by telling me about yourself, where you're from, a little about where you went to school, however you'd like to introduce yourself.

A: My name is Dr. Adrienne Wald and I have been at UMass Boston now for just about a year and 10 months. I started about a year before the marathon, maybe nine or 10 months. It's kind of the reference point for me these days. My background, I came to UMass Boston from New York where I

had about a 35 year career in the field of nursing and health care in a variety of different roles. At UMass Boston I'm the undergraduate program director for the nursing program. I also have a faculty role but my main role is mainly administrative. I think we've got 700 undergraduate students. I'm responsible for both our traditional nursing program and our accelerated nursing program. I have a doctorate degree from Teachers College Columbia University New York and I have a baccalaureate degree from Boston University as well as an MBA from Adelphi in New York. My MBA is in health care administration so I have a long background in health care and nursing and my main passion is really primary prevention and health promotion.

That's the subject matter that I teach and also professional development. On a more personal level I am turning 59 this year and I have a long background as a marathon runner, including having run Boston Marathon. Qualified for the Boston Marathon when I turned 40 which coincided with my twenty-fifth anniversary of my graduation from Boston University. So for the 100th Boston Marathon I qualified, that was 18 years ago now which is really hard to believe and it was a thrill of a lifetime for me to

qualify the day after my fortieth birthday and then to run the 100th marathon, which was an amazing event, a celebration of 100 years of the history of the Boston Marathon, and to run into Kenmore Square under the Citgo sign and 25 miles on my twenty-fifth BU anniversary right where I used to live, and then to turn the corner and to finish that last mile into the finish. It was quite a thrill. Seems like quite a long time ago though. And then subsequently I ran Boston, a much better running over the next decade or so, and qualified four or five more times. I actually don't remember but I do know that I ran it last, I think it was 2007.

I had qualified to run Boston in 2013 and I actually have my number here which even though I knew I wouldn't be able to run. Since I earned by running the Marine Corps Marathon in one of the toughest runs I ever did, I barely qualified but was able to qualify in the 55 age group. My number, you can see here, has a big X through it which I find really interesting. I never did make it. I was number 20713, wave three, corral three for the 117th Boston Marathon. I got taken out on the ski slope by an out-of-control skier on the last day of 2012 and I broke my sacrum, a couple of thoracic spine vertebra and a rib. And [05:00]

kept skiing two more runs and then realized I was in bad shape, drove back to Boston and subsequently faced a series of medical issues related to my injuries and realized I would not be running Boston in April. It took me a while to accept that and I decided at that point to pay it forward.

I had never volunteered at a race because I was always too busy running them and decided that being new back in Boston -- it was going to be a real thrill for me to run Boston having just moved back to Boston after being in New York for 35 years and I saw it as kind of a homecoming to run the marathon. Instead, since I was in this position of leading these programs of nursing students, I thought it would be just an amazingly wonderful experience for them to volunteer at the marathon. And believe it or not, it's almost as hard to volunteer at the marathon as it is to qualify, to get a number. They are overwhelmed with people who are interested in volunteering for especially the medical type positions, rather than a water stop or handing out medals or some such thing. And because I'd been in running and had some connections for a really long time I was able to way in advance, back in the fall of 2012 -- I guess it couldn't have been. It was after my accident.

Hard to get all these dates and things straight. Kind of blurs at certain points. And some of my memory is somewhat distorted or just difficult due to all kinds of things. I get a little bit murky sometimes. But I guess it must have been right after I realized I couldn't run Boston that I reached out to the BAA and said I'd really love to take my nursing students, can we get some slots? And they said OK, we'll give you X nurse, they gave us 15 or so, and I did an email blast to our nursing students and we had within an hour all the slots were taken.

There was just tremendous interest. The students were so excited about doing this. And I wasn't sure if I was going to get anyone to respond. I was really thrilled to see that kind of a response. It was really nice to see the students. It's Patriot's Day, it's a holiday, and they were volunteering to give up a day off. So I was able to increase the number and we ended up getting 30 spots all together. And I enlisted a dear colleague of mine who has just grown so close from this whole experience, Katie Kafel who is our adult health lecturer and faculty leader and is just a phenomenally talented nurse and an amazing human being and she's another one who just said, "I would love to do this, let's do it together", was on board right away.

So we set up -- my interest in medical care at marathons came from my experience -- I don't remember if it was the marathon in 1996. I don't think it was, but one of the Boston marathons that I ran, it was a very cold day at the end and coming down the last few miles all my energy was just sapped and I ended up crossing the finish line and checking myself into the medical tent where I ended up having a body temperature of about 92, was extremely hypothermic and in pretty bad shape. And they took amazing care of me but I was in the medical tent for several hours getting hot IVs and under the blanket, the warmer, the special warmer that they have to bring the body temperature up.

And I was so impressed with what they did in there that I actually went back and did some research on medical care at marathons and got involved in the American Medical Running Association because I've been a race director for a marathon in New York. So I ended up writing an article about medical care at marathons and interviewing the nurse in charge of the Boston medical tent, a nurse named Joan Casey who did it -- I think she just retired from doing it a few years ago but for 25 or 30 years she was the one who really built the medical tent from being really a mom and

pop kind of thing to this amazing operation of disaster management where [10:00] the public health service and all of the other entities actually do mass casualty training and have this incredible staffing of physicians and nurses and really top medical personnel in the area who volunteer to work in that medical tent. And it's a really impressive operation. I was amazed to learn, you know, the medical record tracking and the way the numbers can be scanned and tracked so that the patients, the runners who get checked in, can be tracked and families can be notified. Because I remember my family didn't know where I was when I got checked into the medical tent. So they're just, it's an amazing operation and I thought it would be great.

The students are actually not allowed in the medical tent because they don't have a license and so the medical tent is really reserved -- and there are two. There's tent A and B and actually I have the map here that we got as part of our orientation for the medical sweep team that we were on and this is a map of the finish area which is really very helpful to kind of orient how everything transpired at the finish line. So basically the students are not allowed in those medical tents because they don't hold a license so we had been assigned to what's called the medical suite

team which is kind of the next step below being a licensed professional and it's really a great role for the students because they're given, they all receive a wheelchair and as part of the process -- these are the little details that at the time didn't seem important and after everything that happened all these little details became incredibly meaningful. And in order to get those wheelchairs the students had to give their license or their school ID to our suite team leader. It was Frank, who's a terrifically talented person in charge of a couple hundred volunteers on the medical suite team. So we arrived on that morning of the marathon and they got their wheelchairs. And before then the students, and as I say, we had about 30 and we had two team leaders because we had students, most of them were nursing students but we had five exercise science students because the college is a joint department of two departments and the College of Exercise Science and Nursing and we wanted to give both types of students the opportunity, especially athletic trainers and students who were going into PT. It was really great exposure for them to see the kinds of injuries and things that they'll see in the real world.

So we had this terrific group of students -- I have my spreadsheet here. Again, I have so many students in this program I really only met these 30 students as part of organizing this, what's become, we call it, our marathon team. And we did everything by email and then we decided, I decided, that they needed to be prepared for this role and I sent them all a copy of the article I had written about medical care at marathons which included an overview of all the major conditions that they could expect, things like exercise associated collapse and hypothermia and heat stroke, a lot of things weather related, and then of course the most common injuries of muscle strains and blisters and the common running types of injuries that one would see.

So they read the article and we had an orientation session here in our large meeting room and everyone got to know each other. And I remember it was the first time I met them all and it was just such a nice cross section of students, different ages and different backgrounds and different year of school. Most of them were juniors and seniors at the time. And they were so enthusiastic. We went around the table and I asked them why they were volunteering and it was just such an interesting range from a couple who were kind of interested, athletes and were

runners themselves to students who just said I want to learn and I want to help people. And I was just incredibly impressed at the time with their stepping forward for this experience. [15:00] I remember being 18 or 19 myself and I wasn't stepping up so quickly to do these kinds of things. At any rate, we put together the spreadsheet. I had two captains, one from exercise science and one from nursing, and they were phenomenal. So organized that, again, the Excel spreadsheet with everyone's contact information and email addresses and phone numbers and majors and all kinds of information that they collected in order to organize everyone.

The BAA is a well-oiled machine and they send out instructions and emails and they have everyone's information, all the volunteer information is organized, they send out instructions, emails on a regular basis so everyone knows exactly what their role is. And it's just amazingly impressive. On the day of the marathon -- another kind of detail that become somewhat important in hindsight, I had to fight -- this is a public institution, we don't have a lot of money growing on trees for extra projects and I remember thinking that we really needed to have something to identify ourselves. I knew that the BAA

gave us some kind of jacket or something but I didn't really know that much about and I thought we really need to have something for the students. And I had a vendor in New York that I've worked with before when I was a race director there, etc., who did these beautiful caps. And for some thought reason I thought the white -- they had a number of colors, I thought the white cap with the UMB logo on the front would be really nice for this event. They were \$10 each, so \$300, but I went right to the dean who was very, very supportive and the associate dean and I said, "Look, we need to have something. It's a community service we're doing and it would be really nice to get them." She said fine, let's just go ahead and get these caps and I ordered them and at the orientation meeting that we had here everybody got their cap and they put them on and I took some pictures and they looked great.

And little did I know that when we went to the BAA orientation they gave us these really beautiful white with blue jackets that the medical volunteers wear. They wear the white jacket with the blue and the other volunteers who do the water stops and the medals and things all got kind of this yellow blue jacket. So everyone knew who was medical and who was not medical, etc. The caps just looked

so awesome with the jackets and the students were beyond thrilled and everyone looked great. And I don't have a cap because I think it ended up somebody couldn't get one and it was me. Which is fine because we had plenty of caps. But it ended up being so wonderful to be able to spot those caps.

Q: Do you want to take a moment?

A: It's just so funny how things happen for -- they were just meant to be. That's \$300 we could have spent that day. At any rate, we went into the auditorium. We met at the John Hancock Center or something. It's right by where the finish area is. It's where the orientation or instructions from the BAA was to meet there, all the other medical volunteers, at 8:00 I think it was, on April 15th. And it was a beautiful day. I remember getting up and just thinking God, I wish I was running. Because it was so hard for me not to be running and I kind of feeling a little bit sad that I wasn't able to run and thinking what have I gotten myself into with being in charge of all [20:00] these students and kind of what's this going to be like?

And we all met outside the auditorium and we had a huge banner that said UMass Boston College of Nursing and Health Sciences and took some pictures there. It was before we

got our jackets and everything. So we went into this auditorium and all 200 medical volunteers were there and the BAA did this fabulous PowerPoint slide show on kind of things that I had already gone over with the students, the flow of the day and what to expect, and the kinds of injuries and where to take people and where things were in relation to each other and kind of the flow of the day. And I remember also -- again, this is one of these details that just comes back to sort of haunt you.

I remember when I met with the students and was telling them about what to expect before we went to the BAA I had gone back myself to look up to see what the average finishing time was so that I could kind of tell them it's going to be slow, first the elite runners are going to come two hours after it starts and all this and then the volume will steadily pick up as more and more runners keep coming across the line and then there's that peak where the average runner will be coming in, and I remember it was between four hours and 4:10 and damn, if that isn't when they set off those bombs. It was so evil. (inaudible)

Q: You can take as long as you need.

A: It's hard to go back there, you know? It's like I can feel myself going back to these moments and it's very painful

and I don't want to go back. I have all these degrees and credentials after my name and I feel like I have to be so professional. One of the most helpful things -- I know this is not sequential at all and I'm trying to be very sequential but --

Q: You can go in whatever order you would like to go in. So feel free to jump around.

A: One of the most helpful things to me after this whole experience was when the BAA had all these support groups. Again, (inaudible) need a support group (inaudible) just fine. But I went to get the students' IDs back. And it was just very reassuring to me to hear -- you know, I wasn't going to go into the support group, I just went to pick up the IDs. It was out at the Waltham Medical Society building and I went out there a few days later to pick up the students' IDs and then I thought oh, I'll just go in and see what's going on. And it turned out to be really helpful to hear cardiac thoracic surgeons who were reduced to tears, just saying that it wasn't like being in the OR where everything's planned and orderly, it was just like nobody could have expected (inaudible). I feel really -- I know that the main thing that's been reported with everybody who's involved, everyone has this sense of guilt that they didn't do enough and a lot of my students

reported oh, I didn't even see anything or whatever, we were [25:00] just there. And because of my injury I was several blocks away because I couldn't even push a wheelchair because of my back problem. So I was four blocks away and I feel like I didn't even -- I feel very guilt ridden. I always, I felt like I didn't see anything, I didn't do anything, I didn't help anyone, why am I so deeply affected by this? And yet I am. And I guess having 30 students all in different zones -- there are 15 zones on this map and we all were assigned to different zones, like three or four in each zone, and these are students that I really barely knew and I couldn't have picked them out of a crowd without those hats. A lot of them I'd met only once or twice and really didn't even know them very well and they were my responsibility. The whole thing was my idea. I told them what a terrific time they were going to happen, that there's nothing like being at the finish line of the Boston marathon, that they'll have an unbelievable day, an incredible experience, going to see an awful lot, and little did I know.

And it was an incredibly beautiful day and everyone was just in such a great mood. You know, you get there, it's eight in the morning, they're out in Hopkinton, they're not

even going to start running for a few hours. Everyone -- I took some of the students, we all went to tour through the medical tents. Tent A is the big huge medical tent right at the finish line and it's just, it's an amazing operation. They have the podiatry section for blisters and foot problems, they have the research section where actually a doctor who's a colleague of mine does hyponatremia research, and there's the trauma area. It's like an ICU for (inaudible) runners mostly, things like heat stroke and whatever. Oh my God, who could ever think what would happen in that tent in just a few hours later?

And there are my students, you know, come out of the auditorium, we're taking pictures and looking at the tent and there's also the backup medical tent B which is much smaller a few blocks away, more where the runners who, they cross that finish line and (inaudible) cheering and stands on one side and the spectators on the other, you know, the VIP stands and then you have -- you get your -- I think you don't get your medal first. You keep walking. They want you to keep moving so you don't get exercise associated collapse and there's food, the bagels and the water and all this, and all the volunteers and all these exhausted runners and they're all coming through. And I'm blocks

away from this but I know -- early on I had a bunch of friends who were kind of elite runners who were running and I moved up and I was closer to where they would be walking and making the turn to go get back to their family reunion area where the elite runners go. Then as it gets busier they stream them down more towards where I was and where the buses are that has everybody's gear and all of that. And so I had gone, I saw some friends across the finish line and I was thrilled to see them. Some of them had made their goals and again, it was just the most beautiful day and everyone -- you thought gee, we're really not going to see that much because the weather was so good, it wasn't too cold, it wasn't too warm, and I'm thinking we're just going to see a lot of really tired runners and cramps and all this.

And it started getting busy and then [30:00] I went back into my zone where I belong. They wanted us -- they were very, very explicit that we were to stay in our zones. Every zone had a leader and Corey was our leader in my zone and she's also become just a really dear friend. She's a nurse, she works full time, she's been volunteering for many years so she really knew the ropes and knew how everything worked and she was great to the students telling

them how everything was going to go. And while waiting with her, you know, they've all got their wheelchairs, I didn't have one because I couldn't push one, and we're kind of just waiting and then everyone -- I was with just a few students who were in my zone. And the next thing I know it was getting busy and more and more runners and I'm helping people get their clothes on and find their bus and really what we do, what the medical suite team does is just kind of really keep scanning, looking for people who just don't look right or who maybe will collapse.

So we're scanning and scanning and I'm thinking I wonder how my students are doing and where they are and what they're seeing. It was a little slow where I was. And all of a sudden everything changed. I'm a New Yorker and I think it made it that much worse for me because even though I wasn't at that finish line and I didn't see some of the really horrific things that my students saw, some of them, I saw this cloud of smoke in that beautiful blue sky and a noise that I'll never forget. It doesn't seem real. I've kind of replayed it a million times. It was like what I saw at the World Trade Center on TV. I was right outside New York when those towers came down and that cloud, that white cloud, is just burned in my mind. And seeing it that

close and knowing what happened to everyone (inaudible). It's the most terrifying thing you can ever, ever imagine. I couldn't -- it was just not believable that it could really be (inaudible). And we had -- I didn't know what was happening. I think that was the most, for me it was just a span of time that seemed like forever that you didn't know if you should run, which was my instinct and maybe -- I still feel like a total coward. I wanted to run so far and so fast. I was absolutely sure that the Hancock building was going to come down or the Prudential Center and then we were finished. I was absolutely sure. People were saying afterwards they didn't know it was some kind of an explosion. I knew immediately and I thought we were going to all die right then and there. I thought (inaudible). And I really didn't know what to do. And that's why [35:00] all this planning and preparation and all of the things that they taught you kicks in and you do what you have to do.

And I remember just knowing that you wanted to (inaudible) kind of gather yourself. I wanted to know what was going on and I also knew that I was supposed to, even though I wanted to go closer I knew I was supposed to stay in my zone. And I stayed in my zone. We had a communications

person, Andy, with a walkie-talkie and Andy was this big guy with a beret on and Andy had the walkie-talkie. Cell phones weren't working. There was a way out and there was a big truck in my zone that was like a news reporter thing and you could go -- I went in there because I wanted to try to figure out what was going on. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know -- there was no one really in charge at that point. And you're in your zone and you have your zone captain and Lori, I think, I don't remember seeing her. So she must have, and I think I know afterwards that she went to help. I don't know if someone told her to do that or not, but again, I don't know where anyone was. I just -- there were runners still coming and I thought I should just stay here and be normal and help to not create panic. But I didn't know what was -- and it sounds like this made sense. This was such small amounts of time that seemed like an eternity. And finally -- I don't remember the second bomb. I sort of -- they merged into one to me. I knew they were separate but I don't remember them as such.

Q: They were very quick.

A: Yeah, all the research I've done, it's 12 seconds. And then things started happening really fast. And I remember thinking -- I don't know -- the first information I got was -- I can't remember but I remember Andy telling us -- oh, I

found someone else -- we were -- somehow this wonderful piece of paper with all those numbers, I don't think I had it but someone did. I can't remember. I just don't remember but I know we were texting each other. Finally things started -- we got messages to everyone. But in between that there was nothing. There was just a complete whiteout of information. There was nothing going (inaudible). And then my son, I have a 24-year-old son in New York and I think I had tried to reach my boyfriend and my son, and my son started to text me, "Mom, run, there are more bombs, you have to get out of there. Please run."

And (inaudible). There are some things I can't really -- I can't experience that again. But I also had all these kids there the same age as him, and younger, and I didn't know where they were. And I didn't know if more bombs were going to start blowing up all over the place. You know, you just -- I said, "Jeremy, I love you but I'm not going anywhere." And I said I hope -- in my mind, I don't know if I said it or who knows, but I remember being very conscious of thinking I have had an amazing wonderful life and there's nothing that I've missed and please take me, not my kids. I just remember thinking what a wonderful [40:00] life I had. And then thinking about those parents.

So we just tried to find everyone and we kept texting and I just took -- I took charge because that was my role that day and I said -- and I didn't know -- Andy, our communication guy, they said everybody go to medical tent B, so we went there from where I was and I guess they were thinking that there would be backup -- medical tent A, I understand from hindsight, was covered, there were enough people there. And I knew from all the research I had done that that finish line where I saw that smoke, that there were people there who knew what to do and me running there wasn't going to help and anything that could be done there would be top orthopedists, the top emergency folks, they were right there and I was four blocks away.

And again, we just did what we were told, which was to stay in our zone. And at that point though there was all kinds of conflicting information, that there were more bombs, dadada. And I just said OK, everyone, all the students go to medical tent A, because I needed to see them, I needed to check them off on my list. And they started to show up and I could see the white caps coming from all different directions and it was so great to see those white caps. They were so -- I don't know if you can see it in this

picture but this is one of my students who was right there helping someone.

Q: Oh, wow.

A: Who has -- I don't know if he lost his leg or not, but you can see the anguish on his face. And this is my student who was a Marine. He was in the Marines and he never saw anything like this. And there's the UMass Boston hat and the white jacket. It wasn't white after this because Spencer -- actually I don't want to use names but my student asked me afterwards if I could help him get another jacket because his was all covered with blood. And it meant so much for him to have that jacket that I didn't tell him -- I told him I could get him another one and I worked with the BAA to try to get one but they didn't have any more white ones so I gave him mine. Mine was clean as a whistle, I'm embarrassed to say. He was right there. He was supposed to be in my zone and he wanted to see some action. He moved up, he was right out by medical tent A. And you know what, it's a good thing because he really helped.

Q: A strong-looking kid.

A: I'm so proud of these students, I can't tell you. Every single one of them. But I think what's been the hardest thing for me is the thought of anything -- if something had

happened to one of them. But we got to medical tent B there were only 25 instead of 30 and I kept -- I didn't know where everybody was and at that point they told us that they were getting reports that there were more bombs, that there was a bomb at the public library, which is across the street, and that there was one at JFK UMass campus. All you heard was sirens all over the place and ambulances and police cars and on and on and on and I just said you know what, and maybe this was cowardly, I don't know what time it was, I don't know how long things -- I have no concept of time during this whole thing but at that point I had almost [45:00] all of my students and I thought if that bomb, if there's another bomb we're not going to do anybody any good to die here, let's get out of here. And I said let's go and they started -- I said leave your wheelchairs here, it's OK. Oh, no, we're supposed to -- I said leave your wheelchairs, follow me. And we left.

Q: You took care of what you had to.

A: At the time I just did what seemed to be the right thing. And we didn't know if the T was running. All we could hear were sirens all over. We went to the Boston Commons, to the corner right by the thing, and we still -- I have a picture here of everyone afterwards. But this even after. This was later. But all of them, I have a picture in my

office from another article of all the students leaving the scene and texting in the commons. We're all walking, they all have their white jackets and their hats and they're all texting their parents, tell them you're OK. And they're texting their parents and texting them, we're walking through the Commons and I didn't know where to go. But I live on Beacon Hill and I took all of them to my apartment. And it was crazy to be walking down Charles Street and people are shopping and it's -- not really shopping but there were people, it just seemed like a normal day or normal thing and we just were in this war zone.

And then -- and we still didn't know what happened. We didn't know what happened. We had no idea. Some of the students knew because they were right there. They were helping people. And we were getting an idea but it's all happening at the same time. And we get into my apartment and we turn on the TV and I don't know if you can see, this is my colleague (inaudible) her hand over her face.

Everyone is just listening to this in absolute disbelief. No one's taken off their clothes. We're all just sitting there in absolute disbelief of what had just taken place. And then we started to -- from my professional experience I said we need to do a debriefing and so another -- there was

another one of the students who was a much older, mature, already has a degree, a nursing license but was getting his degree, and we led the debriefing. And we just kind of -- everyone went around and talked about where they were and what they experienced and just kind of made sure everyone was OK. And then people decided whether they wanted to -- we found out the T was running and we decided -- people really wanted to get home and be with their families and all this, and we started to disperse. And then I think I drove some people -- no, I didn't. We walked everyone to the T and that's where this happened. We're walking to the T and we found a runner down.

A lot of the runners, and this is where I feel so badly that we didn't stay and help more and go -- all the runners who were diverted, they were all on the other side from we were and I don't know -- everything was shut down and the security was so crazy that I don't think we could have helped if we wanted to, but I felt like we should have stayed and tried to help more and yet we didn't know if that was the right thing to do. It was just very tough decisions to make that day. And we went, we're walking people to the T, we found this runner, older gentleman, who was diverted and ended up having to walk after running 25

miles, had to walk several miles around back up to Beacon Hill to where he parked his car and he just collapsed in the street. He just had muscle spasms. And we had to actually help carry him [50:00] to his car.

And at this point all of us -- everyone was traumatized in different ways and it really depended on what they had experienced but I didn't learn about it until afterwards. And during all this I'm texting the dean and the associate dean, letting them know that the students are OK and I'm being bombarded with people trying to get information and kind of processing, you know, making sure everybody was OK and just focused on is everyone OK and who needs what and how can I help you get home and who needs a ride and who needs this and what did you see and are you going to be OK and what can I do to help you?

And then at that point there was still -- when I walked into my apartment my friend who ran the marathon is a photojournalist, of all things, from New York and he crossed the line a couple of minutes before the bombs went off and then turned around and covered it and when we walked into my apartment he was sitting there in his singlet and his running clothes, had not done anything, and

was covering the story from New York and he ended up Skyping me and one of my students who was right involved into this Skype. And it was just, it was all very overwhelming because nothing was processed, things were just happening so rapidly that it was almost impossible to process at the same time. And I was so focused on is everyone accounted for and I think to this day I'm still haunted by that. And my personal stress afterwards wasn't related to some of the horrific things that happened that day and some of the real terrible, terrible injuries that people endured and the terrible loss of life. It's just amazing that more people were not lost. It's just phenomenal. I mean I read every article about everything that was done right and I take great pride in knowing that my students and everyone there that day contributed to the fact that there were not as many casualties, mortalities, as there could have been. Because everyone did what they were trained to do, everyone. And it was incredible, the response in the hospitals, eight major trauma centers of Boston, and everything worked to make things go as well as they possibly could given such an evil, despicable situation.

And I just spent a bunch of nights, and I still have nightmares sometimes, not very often, but the big thing was I thought I lost someone. Because what happened, I came back, we came back to the university and opened the next day before everything got shut down and I had students coming in and out of my office.

I want to read you a few things from my students because I think it just says more than I ever possibly could. This is one of my students who, again, I barely knew her. "Dr. Wald, I just wanted to thank you for your tremendous leadership yesterday and for the amazing example you set as to what a true nurse is. You certainly are one tough and amazing woman and truly exhibited and showed me what fearless is." It's amazing how I felt nothing like this. "And it is easy to let the horrible event and unbelievable amount of hate from yesterday intimidate us but I actually read a quote on Facebook from Mr. Rogers, of all people, that really put yesterday [55:00] into perspective. 'When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You would always find people who are helping."'" I've never been prouder to be a future nurse and helper. Instead of letting this event make me weaker or timid toward my career

choice I intend to only let it make me that much stronger. I am doing just fine. Everything from yesterday started to sink in today and I'm unbelievably grateful that we were all OK. I have tremendous family and great friends to support me. I was a block away when everything happened and saw and did very little when I was finally sent up to tent A. I wish I could have done more."

This is what they all said. "I cannot imagine the array of emotions you were experiencing. I hope you are doing OK and please know if you need anyone to talk to I'd be more than happy to listen." With her phone number. "Much love." This is what happened. Every single one of them was more concerned about the other one and this one coming into my office saying I'm worried about this one and this one saying I'm worried about this one and this one -- it was unbelievable the way they processed this and how -- when I say a team these are students who 10 days later we went to the memorial in Copley together, they supported each other, they to this day are supporting each other.

We're all going back to volunteer again together and there's a bond between these students that is just unbelievable. It's unbelievable. Just to give you another

idea, this was a more mature student who helped with some of the debriefing that we did. "Thank you for your ongoing care and consideration and for being an inspiration to work with before any of these tragic events unfolded. The additional obvious support of the college and the leadership was also gratifying. I'm personally doing fine in that I'm not experiencing any major personal impact from the experience of supporting the marathon and the tragic events that day. I was glued to the coverage," blah, blah, blah. "I very much appreciate the opportunities for reuniting and mutual support that are being created for our group. Beyond continued concern for the victims, classmates and others impacted by this my only future thoughts are whether" -- he goes through some things that he looked at in terms of what could have gone smoother and some recommendations about walkie-talkies and things which is, again, everyone processed this in a different way looking at what happened that day.

And then the days afterwards, the next day -- I had been interviewed and this interview went all over the place. I got emails and phone calls from people I haven't heard from in 20 years, are you OK? And letters and things on my phone message here at work. "Dear Dr. Wald, I write this

letter to you with the heaviest of hearts. I saw your interview on TV this week and was moved by the heroics of both you and your class. How something with such positive intentions could take such a horrific turn of events is beyond me. I imagine that as an educator/mentor to the students you lead it's puzzling to you as well. To hear you talk of the swift actions your students took was moving. It struck to the core of human decency and I was overwhelmed with emotions. Though you and they may not realize it you all took selfless actions to help others in a dire time of need. There are so many people that deserve thanks and praise for their actions this week. Even as I write this there continue to be those putting their own lives at risk to protect the sanctity of our nation. I hope this is something that -- I hope you and your students are doing well and moving forward." There's a kind of outpouring of support within the community that the students really, really needed.

Feel like I'm rambling on forever. Just it's an endless story and it's not -- there were so many of us there together that to try to convey [60:00] [long pause] a sense of gratitude and appreciation for everyone's safety it just, I'm grateful every minute for it and, as I said, the

hardest part for me was the thought that something happened to one of my students and that I would have to tell a parent -- you know, it's so unthinkable to me. When I held those cards, those ID cards, in my hands I looked at those faces on those ID cards and I thought oh my God, if any one of them something happened to, I don't know how I would live with it. And I kept waking up in the night -- I couldn't eat or sleep for several nights. I kept counting. I kept counting and counting and counting and thinking that I missed someone. It's the most terrifying thing in the world to think that something might have happened to one of them. I still don't believe they're all safe. I still --

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A: -- still worry about them, still worry that they're OK. And I know I don't have to because they are OK and we're making sure that they're OK and I have to say that they have helped each other. We've had incredible professional support of everyone here. The BAA has been fabulous. They've had ongoing support groups and they've really reached out to make sure everyone's OK. The students came back here, first thing they wanted to do was to raise money for the One Fund. They made a T-shirt that they designed

that was beautiful, UMass Boston, Boston Strong. They sold them all over the place. They're running around -- some of them, this was their way of processing it. I was so worried about them because they were almost frenetic selling these T-shirts and money and they ended up raising \$8,000 for the One Fund.

All they kept talking about was they didn't do enough and concern for the victims and for their families and I think that was such a healing thing for everyone to just do something positive to raise money, to focus on how we can -- on being strong and on Boston Strong and on resilience and supporting each other. They all said -- it's interesting, all of them were very clear that the thing that was the most helpful was each other. That it wasn't helpful for them to talk to people who weren't there. If you weren't there you didn't understand. And that's something that the literature supports. So they are a team and in a couple of weeks we're going to go back and we're going to get it right this time and I'm looking forward to seeing a lot of blisters. Hard to believe it's a year.

Q: Yeah, it's very, very suddenly approaching, I feel. You literally went through any question I could have asked you and that really leaves us with if there's anything else you

feel like you want to say about anything. And that's up to you. If there's anything else you wanted to add, if you wanted to talk about some of the work that you've been doing in the past year and if not...

A: It's nice to talk about this and to feel free enough to be emotional because I have tried to contain my emotions for a really long time. And I always feel like I have to be the professional with my students and that I have to be strong for them so when they come in to my office I don't start to cry like this and I don't fall apart. And I need to be the leader and I need to be strong for them and also to be human. I mean we've had human moments, believe me, but I think that it's hard to find that balance though of professionalism and we're all human, and at the end of the day we all do have these very raw feelings.

I guess the only thing that I would add is that the research that I'm doing -- I actually am doing a couple of studies on posttraumatic growth and posttraumatic [05:00] stress and I also looked at the -- very interested in the college health services and counseling response in the Boston area because such an unusual event, there are so many colleges concentrated. I didn't even realize how many colleges were concentrated right along the Boston Marathon

course. So I did do a couple of surveys and I am looking at, with some colleagues in psych and in nursing, looking at some of the data that we have gathered from some of the research that we've conducted. And it's been fascinating for me. Again, I process things very intellectually at times, it's easier than the emotional side, so reading about posttraumatic growth which is something, a concept that I wasn't as familiar with as I was with posttraumatic stress disorder, there's a very interesting body of literature about posttraumatic growth and how this type of experience does have this kind of paradoxical positive growth that people experience.

And I have found that, again, I have more emails than I can read you but the gist of what my students tell me is I'm going to be a better nurse now and I'm studying harder and now I want to be a trauma nurse and now I want to work in the emergency department and now I want to work in the ICU and I am more committed than ever to my career and I'm so much more sure that this is where I belong. And this incredible outpouring of dedication and commitment to a field that I've loved for 35 years and more and the pride that I take in being part of such a profession that does

check your emotions at the door and do what needs to be done.

You know, I took my students afterwards to Beth Israel Medical Center where they had all the perioperative nurses at all the hospitals talking about what each OR did and the students learned a tremendous amount about trauma nursing and the particular response at each hospital and how they closed down the ORs and canceled elective surgery and all the things that went right. It speaks to what an amazing profession and again how it went from the nurses at the front lines there who volunteered like my students on a holiday to give up 10 hours to just help people because that's what nurses do to the nurses that were waiting at the ER, trained in emergency nursing, to the OR nurses to the rehab nurses to the psych nurses who worked with those poor families trying to figure out where their loved ones were. It was such an amazing cycle of everyone, again, doing what they're trained to do and doing it really well.

And it gives you even more of an appreciation for the work we do as educators to train nurses who are going to go out and be the helpers in the world. And that's the best we can do and the good guys will always as far as I'm

concerned. On that note, we go back to Boston, 118th
running and we are Boston strong forever. Thank you.

Q: Excellent, thank you.

A: Thank you.

Q: And that will conclude our recorded Strong Medicine
interview today.

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