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## 3 Top Tips From Key Opinion Leaders

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Key opinion leaders (KOL) in the ICU field are often coming up with fantastic tips for becoming a better leader or clinician. We decided to share our top three with you:

### 1. Find/Encourage a Balance

Balance is recommended in a variety of areas in life, and so it is with clinical practice too. It's critical for a clinician to assess the criteria of an injury, formulate a thought process and come to a swift decision. It is also important that she/he provide a microcosm of working moral virtues. Balancing this with one's own needs can be complicated, especially when things do not always turn out as hoped. In some cases, equanimity is needed to accept that which cannot be changed and move onto the next patient with a clear and open mind.

A work-life balance can help to enable staff to deal with the stresses of the workplace and prevent burnout. This means that a healthy and conducive hospital environment should be provided.

[Prof. Ruth Kleinpell](#)—the 2017 President of the [Society of Critical Care Medicine](#), and director at the Center for Clinical Research & Scholarship, Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, Illinois, USA—believes: “A balance is needed between system solutions to address prevention of burnout. This includes providing staff with adequate lunch and break times, and encouraging them to take advantage of workplace fitness facilities or other stress reduction measures. The demands of patient care in the ICU can be challenging and the fast-paced environment can lead to a stressful work environment.

“Having workplace measures in place such as yoga or fitness classes, and ensuring adequate staff support measures such as debriefings after an emergency situation are very useful in providing stress relief and in balancing the fast-paced work environment in the ICU.”

### 2. Be Mindful

Mindfulness—the mental state achieved by focusing your awareness on the present moment without conceding to distractions; and committing to acknowledgment and acceptance of your feelings and thoughts—is not an easy task, and it can take a great deal of practice.

Even though mindfulness can take some time to master, just the intention to be mindful can bring great returns in the form of reduced stress and anxiety, clarity of the mind and improved decision making.

Mindfulness is a way of life that is being increasingly adopted by all kinds of people from different backgrounds and from diverse professions. It's uptake as a serious and valuable means to improve our mindsets and performance in the medical setting has, however, been delayed.

[Prof. Ronald Epstein](#)—a family physician at the University of Rochester Medical Center in New York, USA—has been endorsing the concept of mindfulness in medicine as an effective way to reduce errors and burnout and to provide better care.

Epstein says that some clinicians are naturally mindful, but most have to learn how to ward off distraction, mind wandering and complacency. As a leader, you can help your fellow colleagues to achieve this beneficial state of mind.

“Through our research over the past ten years, we've found ways to help clinicians learn to be more mindful; they can build three cornerstones of attention—unwavering focus on a task, vigilance for the unexpected, and choosing what to attend to when there are multiple stimuli competing for limited cognitive resources.

“Attention training is not just a solo activity. When teams share mental models of a situation and communicate effectively, they can be collectively vigilant, observant, curious and present.”

A mindful clinician will be curious when they encounter difficulties, rather than being defensive or rigid. This means adopting a beginner's mind, being present, attentive, and composed, and being open to new ways of seeing things.

### 3. Think Actively

Formulating an environment which enables and encourages medical professionals to think actively and to collaborate and coordinate their thinking is crucial to a productive ICU and a functional learning environment.

[Prof. Bin Du](#), who is director of the Medical ICU at Peking Union Medical College Hospital in Beijing, China encourages his team to take initiative. “One of the major challenges in my field is to encourage everyone to think actively rather than learn passively,” he said.

His top management tip to encourage a healthy, educational and collaborative working environment is to make it happy and friendly so that everyone is willing to make a contribution.

Ensuring staff feel recognised, motivated and happy is a great step, as is team training that emphasises not just coordination of technical skills, but also communication and coordination of thought processes and insight. Prof. Du mentions a favourite quote: “The value of ... education is not the learning of many facts but the training of the mind to think” (Albert Einstein).

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