

# MD Life

NOVEMBER 2023





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# Doctors Rediscover Joy in Practicing Medicine, On Their Own Terms

KIM DOWNEY, PT

Challenging and frustrating are two words describing what it feels like to be a doctor today. Yet numerous physicians are sharing their journeys as to how they moved through difficult times and have been able to find joy again by practicing medicine on their own terms.

The following doctors describe how they have continued seeing patients while incorporating additional pursuits that help them feel balanced and fulfilled.



## **Amna Shabbir, MD**

I had a lot of ambition, energy, and love for the practice of medicine when I started my first job after training. In a few months, however, I felt depleted, disempowered, and drowning in work. I did not know what was a “me” problem and what was a “system” issue. I also did not know who to turn to for help.

When I started getting coached, clarity was the most priceless gain I attained. Prior to this, I had wanted to leave medicine completely. Getting coached allowed me to recognize my passions further. I returned to medical training and did a fellowship. I learned to advocate for myself while finding my next job and be in a space of authenticity and alignment.

Being able to practice medicine with autonomy, surrounded by supportive colleagues, has been the most joyful professional discovery I’ve made. Finding a community of like-minded physicians who are all advocating for physician wellness and working alongside them has been so fulfilling. During this journey, I also received my coach certification and currently help early career physicians navigate transitioning from training to being an attending and beyond. Outside of work, spending time with my family has been key in my healing.

When we are in the awful space of burnout, overwhelm, and moral injury, everything appears unattainable; even asking for help is exhausting. Know that things can change and life truly can get better. One simply must take the first step and ask for help. Yes, it can be that simple. I would urge you to take that first step and not wait any longer.

## **Tamara Beckford, MD**

In March 2020, the pandemic hit. I was an emergency medicine physician working on the front lines. It was the most challenging time of my career. People were scared; the hospital was busy, and we didn’t understand the virus.

One by one, those around me contracted the virus. I wondered if I would be next. I only knew that COVID-19 spread quickly and could be fatal. Although I could access personal protective equipment, I wondered what would happen if I caught the virus.

It was also a period of introspection. I always wanted to do something outside medicine, but fear kept me stuck. I had been practicing for nearly 15 years, mistakenly thinking it was the only thing I could do.

The pandemic was the impetus for change. I took massive action, joined a community of entrepreneurial physicians and found a coach. Although I had no formal training, I decided to learn the skills needed to start a live show online and launch a business.

On the show, I interview physicians worldwide about their fantastic work inside and outside clinical medicine to amplify their stories. While still working clinically, I chat with a new physician weekly. These conversations bring me joy, hope, and excitement.

My business helps companies reduce employee burnout and stress through workshops. I teach the same strategies that allowed me to avoid burnout during the pandemic. I facilitate retreats for private practice owners, focusing on achieving three key goals: enhancing team cohesion, combating burnout, and ultimately driving increased profits.

I also serve as a success mentor, leading 40+ physicians weekly in small groups. Adding these dimensions to my work has helped me thrive. I realized I could practice medicine and live on my terms.

### **Robert Kornfeld, DPM**

Training had me entrenched in the traditional Western medical model. That is how I began my career. Two years after I started my practice, I became ill. I went to my internist, and he gave me medications. They didn't help. I went back. He changed the prescriptions. I had bad side effects. I went to a new doctor. He gave me a different prescription. It didn't help. Finally, out of frustration, I went to a holistic doctor. It was a completely different experience. The initial consultation was over an hour. He did lab work and eventually gave me a protocol that healed me within 6 weeks (after almost 2 years of suffering). I was amazed at the power inherent in nature. I dove into learning everything I could, taking every course, attending every seminar, and reading as many books as possible. By 1987, I decided to incorporate it into my practice. And it was magical.

Since insurance would not reimburse for these services, I created a hybrid practice. Traditional services were offered through insurance. The rest had to be paid by the patient directly to the office. The results of my protocols were astounding to me. I attracted many patients who were failed by traditional medicine. My practice became a chronic foot and ankle pain practice. By 2000, the overwhelming stress of dealing with insurance and the ever-decreasing reimbursements was more than I was willing to accept; I created a fully direct-pay practice.

I have enjoyed a stellar career and love what I do. Best of all, insurance companies cannot dictate what I can and cannot do for my patients. I created a course for podiatrists to learn functional medicine and teach them how to leave insurance dependency, creating a practice that puts the patient first.

If you're stuck, it's because you're pouring the glue on your own feet.

*Kim Downey is a physical therapist.*

# How To Trust What You Read Online and Tell If It's AI or Human

BY KIM KOMANDO, KOMANDO.COM

I got this note from Ben in Texas. “Hi there, Kim. I love your podcast. You were talking about AI and I got to thinking. When I read a story online at some website, how can I tell if a human wrote it or some bot?”

Ask USA Today. Last week, a bunch of mysterious bylines (**WashPo**, [paywall link](#)) with stories suddenly appeared on its site. Did these writers have a pulse?



Staff writers at Reviewed spoke out that management published stories written by AI under the names of non-existent humans. They couldn't find these writers with any other bylines or social media profiles, not even on LinkedIn. Of course, the parent company, Gannett, denies it all.

## AI lies

When reading something online, especially at a big site, you want to trust that what you get is the truth. But AI makes things up. Did you hear about the law professor who was **accused of sexual harassment**? AI made up the whole story.

Humans code AI algorithms, folks, and we're all full of opinions and biases. When you read an AI-generated article or social media post, remember that you're actually getting a spoonful of someone else's viewpoint. It's like a game of digital telephone, and sometimes, you only hear one side of the story.

I know it's a lot to think about. Let's start with identifying what's AI-generated and what's not. I've got your back with the telltale signs a chatbot made that article or webpage.

## It wants to sound important

Remember back in school when you were trying to fill a word or page count? You see the same information repeated over and over ... and over, with only slight changes in the phrasing.

Keep an eye out for vocab words that are unnecessary and eye-rolling transitions like “Moreover,” “Consequently” and “Furthermore.” That's not a kid at his first journalism job — it's a telltale sign of a bot in the bytes.

## Chatbots don't do analysis

AI can state facts, but it cannot talk about how that impacts real life. A human-written celebrity gossip piece would end with something like, “Kim Kardashian dieting for months to squeeze her butt into the 60-year-old Marilyn Monroe dress proves she'll do what she must to get attention on social media.”

A human writer will draw a meaningful *conclusion*. If an article is just spouting statements like “Kim Kardashian wore a dress that Marilyn Monroe owned,” it might be AI.

### Quotes and numbers don't pan out

AI can write quotes and cite numbers like nobody's business! As **CNN pointed out**, when chatbots are asked to write an article with quotes, they (hilariously) make up names like John Doe and Jane Smith. Not so hard to spot.

AI is also really bad at quoting real-world figures. If an article gives a percentage, ratio or amount, copy and paste that thing into Google. If a chatbot wrote it, there's a good chance you won't find any other evidence.

### There's no personality

Chatbots really struggle with humor. The result is often bland writing without an interesting perspective or take. If you find yourself thinking, “Wait, this website used to have a lot more humor or wit,” AI writers may be taking over.

If you think, “I wish Kim would stop making those bad jokes,” congrats, you're getting an email written by me, real-life Kim Komando.

### Keeping an eye out

Since ChatGPT launched last November, phishing emails are up 1,265%. That's not a typo! AI **chatbots are popping up** in new corners of the internet every day. And that's not a bad thing. Like this handy use: AI assistants can scour long articles, research for us and **sum up the main points**.

But remember, AI has been found to hallucinate (that's the real term for it) statistics, legal cases, names and science. It just makes crap up, well, kinda like humans do.

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# Combating Physician Burnout: The Case for Subsidized Vacations

ANGEL GARCIA OTANO, MD

Physician burnout is a pressing issue in the health care industry, with detrimental effects on both health care providers and the American public. Family physicians, in particular, play a crucial role in the well-being of individuals and communities. This essay explores the mental health benefits that family physicians derive from enjoying time away from the office and argues for government subsidization of their vacation time as a measure to mitigate burnout. It also highlights the importance of involving insurance companies in supporting such initiatives.



## **The impact of burnout on physicians and public health**

Numerous studies have shown that physician burnout has far-reaching consequences. Burnout leads to reduced job satisfaction, higher rates of medical errors, decreased productivity, and increased turnover rates among health care professionals. This ultimately compromises the quality of care provided to patients and negatively impacts public health.

## **Mental health benefits for family physicians**

Taking time away from work is essential for family physicians to recharge, rejuvenate, and maintain their mental well-being. Vacations provide opportunities for self-care, stress reduction, and the cultivation of a healthy work-life balance. Research has shown that regular vacations can improve mood, decrease stress levels, enhance job satisfaction, and reduce the risk of burnout among healthcare professionals.

## **Government subsidization of vacation time**

Government subsidization of family physicians' vacation time can contribute to reducing burnout and improving mental health in the medical profession. By providing financial assistance or tax incentives, the government can incentivize family physicians to take regular vacations. This support acknowledges the significance of physicians' mental well-being and recognizes their dedication to public health. Moreover, it promotes a healthier work environment, which translates into better patient care.

## **Benefits for the American public**

The mental health and well-being of family physicians directly impact the quality of care they provide. By ensuring their mental well-being, the government safeguards the health and safety of the American public. Studies have demonstrated that physicians who are well-rested and less burned out are more likely to exhibit empathy, make accurate diagnoses, and provide superior patient care. Therefore, subsidizing vacation time for family physicians contributes to better health outcomes and increased patient satisfaction.

## **Involving insurance companies**

In addition to government support, involving insurance companies is crucial to alleviate the financial burden of family physicians' vacation expenses. Insurance companies can offer specific coverage plans that include

vacation benefits for physicians. By doing so, they recognize the importance of mental health and well-being in delivering quality health care. Collaborative efforts between the government, insurance companies, and health care providers can ensure that family physicians have the means to take vacations without financial strain.

## Conclusion

The mental health benefits derived from family physicians enjoying time away from the office are pivotal in combating burnout and improving patient care. Government subsidization of vacation time, along with the involvement of insurance companies, can play a significant role in supporting physicians' mental well-being. By investing in the mental health of family physicians, the government demonstrates its commitment to the overall health of the American public. Promoting a sustainable work-life balance for family physicians is not only beneficial for the physicians themselves but also for the communities they serve.

Angel Garcia Otano is a family physician.

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# Israel-Palestine War: Gaza's Doctors Refuse to Abandon Patients as Israel Pounds Hospitals

By Aseel Mousa and Abdallah al-Naami in Gaza, Occupied Palestine

Medical staff describe apocalyptic scenes where they have to make life-or-death decisions to rescue those wounded by air strikes.



*A medical worker assists a premature Palestinian baby who lies in an incubator at the maternity ward of Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, 22 October 2023 (Reuters)*

Doctors in northern Gaza are sounding the alarm about a humanitarian "catastrophe" as Israel continues its ferocious [air strikes](#) and siege on the coastal enclave for a third week. Since Israel cut off all electricity, fuel and water to Gaza on 9 October, hospitals have been overwhelmed, with a lack of life-saving resources and a high volume of critically wounded patients.

Patients who have been wounded in air strikes, pregnant women, children and people with kidney failure are some of the worst affected. The hospitals that are still working are running on generators, which health officials say won't last long. In Gaza's biggest hospital, al-Shifa, doctors are faced with a massive influx of casualties, added to the thousands of displaced civilians taking shelter there.

Bassel Amr, a volunteer ICU physician, highlighted that the number of the wounded brought in all at once is bigger than the hospital's capacity. This applies to the space in both the urgent care and operation rooms. "We have 17 operation rooms that are prepared at the same time during massacres and ready to be used. But that is not enough. Most of the wounded need operations," he told Middle East Eye.

"But we only have the capacity to deal with 17 people at a time, while the rest wait for their turn, and some die in front of your eyes and you cannot help them because the operation rooms are full," he added. "The wounded keep dying in front of your eyes but there's nothing we can do." The most traumatizing situation faced by Amr and his colleagues is the fact that they have to prioritize some cases over others.

"We are left in a situation where we have to make the difficult decision to risk the life of one patient in order to save the life of another," he told MEE. Amr also pointed out that the hospital has no space for post-operative care, and many patients have to sleep in the intensive care units, which he says hinders the work of intensive care doctors. This forces doctors to treat patients on the floor. "The hospital won't be able to deal with any other crisis in the coming days as its equipment and necessary tools are already running out," he warned.



*A Palestinian woman holds her children, who were wounded along with her in an Israeli strike, at Shifa hospital in Gaza City, 23 October 2023 (Reuters)*

On Wednesday, the [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA) said that at least 12 out of the 35 hospitals in Gaza are now out of service because of damage from Israeli bombardment and Israel's decision to cut off fuel supplies to the besieged enclave.

OCHA added that 46 out of 72 healthcare clinics have also shut down, leaving thousands of people without any form of medical aid amid ongoing heavy bombardment. The remaining clinics and hospitals are running on generators and have few resources to treat patients who have been critically wounded or are in intensive care.

Doctors and health officials have been warning for days that fuel is set to run out completely by Thursday. They say this will lead to the instant death of thousands of people, including newborn babies in incubators, wounded people in intensive care units, and kidney dialysis patients, among others. As Israel prepares for its planned ground invasion of Gaza, it has warned residents in the north to flee south to avoid being targeted. That includes hospitals. But health officials at Gaza's biggest hospitals have insisted the evacuation of the wounded and displaced would be impossible.

Hospitals are also dangerously overcrowded. As almost 1.4 million people in Gaza are now internally displaced, thousands have taken shelter in hospitals. Al-Shifa hospital alone is now home to 62,000 displaced people, according to Amr, and viruses are spreading rapidly. This compounds the lack of sterilization in the hospital for patients, which makes them vulnerable to infections, he added. International organizations have warned about the spread of water-borne diseases and scabies because of a lack of clean water in the territory.

Amr added that the type of wounds received by his hospital, mainly scarring and disfigurements, indicates another health crisis after the end of hostilities. "Many of the wounded will live but will have to be on medication for a long time to manage the pain, which may lead to addiction. Others will live with disabilities."

### **No shrouds for burial**

Hussam al-Madhoun, another doctor, highlighted a similar situation at al-Awda hospital in northern Gaza. He said the hospital "has no space to walk" as thousands of civilians have also taken refuge there from the Israeli bombing. Similar to al-Shifa, al-Awda doesn't have enough room for casualties and is suffering a severe shortage of supplies.

"In the beginning, there was a scarcity of medical supplies, now there is a scarcity of available beds at the intensive care unit, and of oxygen, medical and sterilization materials," he told MEE.

"I referred a girl with a nerve injury to the neurosurgery department, but was told there was no capacity to take her," he said. He added that Gaza is now suffering from a shortage of shrouds.



"There is nothing worse than not finding enough shrouds to cover the martyrs, so you wrap them with garbage bags and old pieces of cloth," he said. Al-Madhoun, however, is undeterred. "I am physically and emotionally exhausted, but this is my duty and I must carry it," he said. Meanwhile, at Al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital in central Gaza, the obstetrics department has been converted from delivery rooms and clinics into operating rooms for treating the wounded.

One doctor working in the obstetrics and neonatology department told MEE that the hospital staff are operating "in a state of panic, fear and shock" as Israel has warned them to flee and already bombed a building adjacent to the hospital. "One night, I was working in my department caring for sick newborns when the Israeli occupation shelled a house next to the hospital. My colleagues and I tried to secure the children," she said, on condition of anonymity.

### **Electricity cut off**

"Our department suffered damage because of the shelling, and the electricity was cut off for a short time." The doctor added that the hospital is now a place of refuge for thousands of displaced people who are fleeing the north of Gaza to the central region seeking safety, on top of the overwhelming number of patients arriving for treatment. "The sound of ambulances carrying casualties from Israeli air strikes has never ceased over the past couple of weeks; it's around the clock," she said. "The number of casualties is so great that the hospital can no longer accommodate them and is unable to cope," she added.

"Now, with the ongoing siege and the fuel running out soon, a humanitarian catastrophe is imminent, and we will lose patients in our department and possibly thousands of patients in the entire hospital."

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# The 10 Best Tech Gifts of 2023

We've rounded up the best tech gifts for everyone on your list this year, starting at just \$15.

Written by **Sabrina Ortiz**, Editor, dnet.com

One of the main objectives of tech products is to enhance the users' lives in some way, typically making their lives easier. For that reason, everyone, regardless of technological savviness or age, can benefit from a new tech gadget for the holidays.

However, the market is so saturated with new tech products in nearly every category that finding the best product to buy can be an overwhelming task. For that reason, ZDNET identified all the different people who might be on your shopping list and the best gift for each one of them.

Whether you're shopping for someone who loves listening to music, cooking, working out, reading, drinking coffee, or more, we have got you covered with a tech product that they will absolutely love, and the best part is some are even on sale.

## The best tech gift ideas

### **iRobot Roomba** Best all-around gift



Beth Mauder/ZDNET

- **Price:** \$800 (on-sale for \$633 at Walmart)

Whether the person you are shopping for has been a long-time homeowner or just moved into their college dorm, there is one thing they can all use a hand with--cleaning. Although cleaning your floors can be one of the most dreadful chores, it is something that has to be done on a pretty consistent basis to upkeep your living space.

That's why a robot vacuum is such a great gift everyone can enjoy. The Roomba j7+ earned a spot as ZDNET's best robot vacuum overall because of its impressive capabilities, which include a self-emptying auto-empty base, PrecisionVision Navigation to recognize and avoid common household objects, and multi-surface compatibility.

Although the price may seem steep, you can score a deal multiple times throughout the year, including Black Friday, which is right around the corner. Right now, you can score the Roomba j7+ for 25% off on Amazon.

## **Echo Show 8 Display**

### **Best gift for the smart home**



Maria Diaz/ZDNET

- **Price:** \$150

Amazon just recently released its all new, third-generation Echo Show 8, which boasts major upgrades from its previous models, including a better 13 MP camera, a faster processor, a sleeker design, spatial audio, and more. In addition to providing Alexa assistance on a variety of tasks, the Echo Show 8 can be used to make video calls, stream content, display photos, and, most importantly, double as a smart home hub.

Users can connect the Echo Show 8 to their other smart home devices, including cameras, lights, plugs, and more from compatible brands, such as Zigbee, Matter, and Thread, giving them the ability to control their entire smart home ecosystem from one device. For this reason, if you know someone who already has some smart home devices, this piece would be the perfect addition to round out their ecosystem.

## **Oura Ring**

### **Best gift for the fitness aficionado**

**Price:** \$299

Have a loved one that likes to stay active, work out, or hit the gym? The Oura Ring is a gift sure to impress because of its advanced fitness tracking features, long-lasting battery, and, most importantly, its aesthetic design, which sets it apart from bands and smartwatches that track the same data.



Everyone who has ever owned a smartwatch knows the struggle of forgetting to take the smartwatch off before a major occasion and then having it ruin your look in every photo. With the Oura ring, both men and women can enjoy a sleek, compact wearable that is better fit to match every occasion.

Despite its fashionable design, the ring still has impressive data-tracking features and is capable of monitoring your sleep, activity, recovery, temperature, heart rate, stress, blood oxygen sensing, period prediction, personalized recommendations, and more. The ring can last up to seven days without a charge, making it similar to the rest of the rings in your collection.

## **AirTag**

### **Best gift for the person who loses everything**

**Price:** \$29

If you or anyone you know is anything like me, losing things is an everyday activity. Whether it's my keys, wallet, or remote control, I'm always frantically searching for my belongings--until I started pinging them with AirTags.



AirTags are so simple to set up and track with your iPhone detecting the tag as soon as you unbox it and pull the paper insert out. Then, all you have to do is name it and place it on what you'd like to track, and it will automatically appear on your Apple's Find My Network.

There are so many uses for AirTags; I have even opted to place two AirTags on my dogs to make sure that if they ever get loose, I will be able to find them. Because of its low price-point and compact size, this product could be a great stocking stuffer as well as a stand-alone gift.

## KitchenAid Classic Stand Mixer

The best gift for the person whose happy place is the kitchen

Price: \$330

Whether the person you are shopping for loves to cook or bake, this product will facilitate it all. KitchenAids have become a staple in the stand mixer space, and for good reason. This stand mixer has incredible power, making even the most tedious of mixing tasks an easy lift.

For example, meringue cookies are one of my favorite things to make. However, if you have ever made meringue, you know it takes a while to beat the eggs until they fluff up to the perfect consistency. With the KitchenAid, what would typically take me about 40 minutes to beat by hand is finished in a fraction of the time.



There are also many attachments that make the KitchenAid more than just a stand mixer; but also a pasta maker, ice cream maker, slicer, shredder, and more. Even though it has a higher price tag than many competitors, the high quality of the appliance is worth the investment.

## Amazon Kindle Paperwhite (without Lockscreen Ads)

Best tech gifts for avid readers

Price: \$160

If you know someone who is an avid reader, the Amazon Kindle Paperwhite is an exceptional gift. This reader boasts some excellent features that will for sure elevate their reading experience, such as an adjustable warm backlight for late-night reading, a glare-free screen for reading in any light, a lightweight and slim design, ten weeks of battery life, and more.

One of the biggest perks is that the Kindle can hold thousands of books with its 8GB storage, minimizing the clutter and space that comes with reading and collecting lots of books on a consistent basis. This Kindle is so impressive that it even landed first place for ZDNET's best Kindle overall, and is sure to make for a gift that doesn't disappoint.



## Ling Card

**Best gift for working professionals**

**Price:** \$15

If you know any working professional who would use a business card, this gift will blow their mind. Whenever I go to a professional event and whip out my Ling card, it always causes an amazed reaction from the person seeking my contact information.

Instead of handing out an antiquated physical business card that most people lose anyway, all you have to do is have the person tap your card with their phone. Since the card is NFC-enabled, the other person will have your contact information that you set up on the Ling app automatically appear. Then, they can click on a save contact option, and your details will be automatically saved to the phone.



## Ember Coffee Mug 2

**Best gift for coffee and tea lovers**



June Wan/ZDNET

- **Price:** \$130

If you are a slow coffee sipper and often end up having to sip on less-than-ideal lukewarm coffee, the Ember Smart Mug seeks to end all lukewarm beverage problems. It can hold 10 ounces of any beverage of choice and can be controlled from a smart app (or without, if the person you are shopping for isn't tech savvy).

The temperature is set to 135 degrees out of the box, and for safety purposes, it shuts off after two hours. However, it can be customized to last between 120 and 145 degrees Fahrenheit, completely customizable to the user's liking.

## **Bose QuietComfort Ultra**

### **Best tech gift for the audiophile**

**Price:** \$430

If you know someone who loves listening to music at all times, gifting them the new Bose QuietComfort Ultra will elevate their entire listening experience. These headphones boast excellent Active Noise Cancellation (ANC), great sound quality, and comfort that make the high price tag worth it.



The headphones are available in the colors White and Black Smoke and sport a clean, sleek design, making them aesthetically pleasing for anyone on your list. Another major plus is that they are geared towards Apple and Android users equally, making them a great fit for everyone, regardless of their device's operating system.

## **Philips - B-Line 346B1C 34" LCD Curved Monitor**

### **Best for remote workers**

**Price:** \$530

If you know someone who has to stare at a screen for hours a day for work but doesn't own a monitor, this gift will make the perfect addition to their work setup. A monitor not only helps me keep a better posture while working but also helps me be more productive by being able to have multiple tabs open at once.



The curvature of the monitor also adds to the comfort of staring at a screen by reducing eyestrain. This particular monitor was picked as ZDNET's best mid-range Phillips large monitor because of its lower price point, compared to other monitors of that size. Despite the lower price point, it still has compelling features such as a built-in docking station, multiple ports, and a widescreen 21:9 aspect ratio.

### **How did we choose these tech gift ideas?**

To put together this list, we first thought of all of the different types of people that you might find on your holiday shopping list and then carefully picked a product that would interest them. To pick those products, we combined our personal experiences with ZDNET's expertise, which can be found in reviews, best-list, and product spotlights, leading us to pick gifts that are sure to impress your family and friends.

# The Health Care Disruptors Are Not Coming - They Are Here

KONYE ORI

Plenty has been written and said about how health care in the United States is too convoluted to be disrupted by new entrants. Dan Munro, health care author, and Forbes contributor compiles most of the rationales provided by thought leaders in his 2018 article titled "10 Reasons Healthcare Won't Be Disrupted." While traditional health care systems carried on with some air of certainty, would-be disruptors continued to make advances, and five years later, they have solidly taken over health care's low-end market. They are coming for the upmarket, and traditional health care systems must set up their command centers now.



Clayton Christensen, professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, laid out the tenets of disruptive innovation: First, the entrants would enter the low end of the market, claim the least profitable portion of the market as its own, and because the incumbent owns the most profitable market segments, they most likely won't fight the entrants for that market share. Second, the entrants will improve their offerings and move upmarket with increasing profitability. Finally, disruption will occur once the incumbents' customers have widely adopted the entrants' offerings in the mainstream market.

So, how have these tenets unfolded in health care in the last five years? And how should health system executives and business leaders prepare for the next ten years?

The would-be disruptors have entered the low end of the market, where they've begun to revolutionize preventive care, primary care, prescription benefits management, and medication dispensing. Upon transforming it, they will march upmarket for the profits of high acuity specialty, subspecialty, and surgical care.

In March 2023, Amazon officially closed on its \$3.9 billion acquisition of primary care provider One Medical to establish a nationwide brick-and-mortar presence and deliver fully integrated primary care in the comfort of people's homes. With annual memberships starting at under \$200, patients are promised access to on-demand virtual care and in-app messaging, same and next-day in-office and remote medical appointments, walk-in laboratory services, and prompt prescription requests and renewals. And with access to One Medical's network of more than 180 offices across the United States, consumers will also have increased options for community-based retail care. Amazon is making health care more accessible, faster, personal, and convenient by integrating pharmacy, telehealth, and primary care into a comprehensive and attractive model.

CVS Health purchased Oak Street Health to expand its primary care footprint. Walmart, which operates 32 health centers delivering primary and urgent care, plans to double that number by 2024. Best Buy struck a deal with Atrium Health to bring certain aspects of hospital care to people's homes with wearable devices that enable care teams to monitor patient's vital signs remotely.

In June 2023, Uber launched same-day, over-the-counter medication delivery directly to patient homes, adding to its transportation of enrolled patients to their doctor's offices and other medical appointments

through Uber Health. Uber's platform streamlines coordination across multiple benefits- non-emergency medical transportation, prescription delivery, food, and over-the-counter medication delivery.

Google has assembled the blocks to build the next-generation clinic. With Onduo, Google has created a virtual diabetes clinic to control insulin performance backed by data from its Fitbit wearable technology. OneFifteen is Google's data-driven physical campus dedicated to all facets of opioid misuse, treatment, and recovery. Calico is Google's biotechnology company, which develops therapies for health and longevity. With Apigee, Google reduces risks during care transitions and empowers collaboration between patients, physicians, and health care providers. Google's G-Suite provides clinical workflow tools and patient data storage in a HIPAA-compliant repository. Google for Retail offers accurate pharmaceutical product information, price, and availability. This array of health care services assembled through in-house start-ups, acquisitions, and strategic partnerships will operate seamlessly across Google's integrated platforms.

What Google, Amazon, CVS, Walmart, Uber, and Best Buy (hereafter referred to as the Big Six) bring to the market is equivalent to fiber-optic internet, ultra high-definition television, or 5G coverage on a mobile network carrier. Consumers ultimately accede to these game-changing features. Once health care consumers assent to the offerings of the Big Six, the upmarket path into high-acuity specialty, subspecialty, and surgical care becomes inevitable.

Google, for example, has its sights on health care's upmarket already. The tech giant now has specialty and surgical care infrastructures in the works. Through OneBraveldea, Google uses genomics and phenotyping in clinical care to solve coronary heart disease. With its Verb Surgical platform, Google combines robotics, advanced visualization and instrumentation, data analytics, and connectivity for digital surgery. Google's DeepMind and Google Ventures focus on developing tools and devices to collect, organize, and activate health data.

Google is determined to get the health care business model of the future right. When Google and other powerful entrants like Amazon succeed, and customers and patients become accustomed to their health brands, traditional health systems will see their market share and profitability erode quickly. A survey by Wolters Kluwer shows that American health care consumers are eager to see the health care landscape and structures dramatically transformed. There'll be no more barriers to the data and information we need to coordinate care and access services on time. With novel technology and business models, these would-be disruptors will ensure we no longer need to test more, treat more, and make patients consume more health services.

The wind of change is blowing, and while not every disruptive path leads to success, and not every successful entrant follows one, health system executives must accelerate innovations to align with the trajectory of health care delivery. The Big Six and other entrants promise better patient health, convenience and ease of care navigation, more fulfilling work for doctors, healthier communities, and less financial strain on health care consumers and taxpayers. So, how should health system executives approach the next ten years?

While traditional health systems entrench their teams in routine internal processes to cut expenses and grow revenue, system executives must also, for the next five years or more, stand up an operational apparatus designed solely to explore models, processes, partnerships, people, and tools that allow traditional health systems to evolve or symbiotically coexist with the Big Six and other entrants: (a) Set up a situation room at the V- and D-suite to closely monitor the Big Six and other entrants in the market to inform, interpret, and recommend actions for formulating and implementing operational responses that defend market shares for

traditional health systems. (b) Create an innovation lab at the B-Suite for stakeholders from across the organization to ideate, create, and develop novel ideas, models, workflows, processes, tools, and mechanisms to help traditional health systems move fast and match the Big Six and other entrants. (c) Empower clinical and administrative leaders to identify opportunities, showcase strengths, exploit weaknesses, and address threats up and down the market under the command center's knowledge, coordination, and decision-making authority.

In 10 years, our traditional health systems could become obsolete when health care consumers have widely adopted the offerings of the Big Six and other entrants in the mainstream health care market. Borders, Blockbuster, and Sears were defenseless when Amazon, Netflix, and e-commerce disrupted them. Taking our chances and hoping to fare better than Borders, Blockbuster, or Sears is no longer a safe bet. Health system chief executives must now set up their command centers and prioritize their defenses. As the adage goes, the best defense is a good offense.

*Konye Ori is a health care finance professional.*

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**Mortgage**

# Ann Margaret and the Vietnam Vet

Richard, (my husband), never really talked a lot about his time in Vietnam, other than he had been shot by a sniper. However, he had a rather grainy, 8 x 10 black and white photo he had taken at a USO show of Ann Margret with Bob Hope in the background that was one of his treasures.

A few years ago, Ann Margaret was doing a book signing at a local bookstore. Richard wanted to see if he could get her to Sign the treasured photo so he arrived at the bookstore at 12 o'clock for the 7:30 signing.



When I got there after work, the line went all the way around the bookstore, circled the parking lot, and disappeared behind a parking garage. Before her appearance, bookstore employees announced that she would sign only her book and no memorabilia would be permitted.

Richard was disappointed, but wanted to show her the photo and let her know how much those shows meant to lonely GI's so far from home. Ann Margaret came out looking as beautiful as ever and, as second in line, it was soon Richard's turn. He presented the book for her signature and then took out the photo. When he did, there were many shouts from the employees that she would not sign it. Richard said, "I understand. I just wanted her to see it."

She took one look at the photo, tears welled up in her eyes and she said, "This is one of my gentlemen from Vietnam and I most certainly will sign his photo. I know what these men did for their country and I always have time for 'my gentlemen.'"

With that, she pulled Richard across the table and planted a big kiss on him. She then made quite a to-do about the bravery of the young men she met over the years, how much she admired them, and how much she appreciated them. There weren't too many dry eyes among those close enough to hear. She then posed for pictures and acted as if he were the only one there.

That night was a turning point for him. He walked a little straighter and, for the first time in years, was proud to have been a Vet. I'll never forget Ann Margaret for her graciousness and how much that small act of kindness meant to my husband. Later at dinner, Richard was very quiet. When I asked if he'd like to talk about it, my big, strong husband broke down in tears.

"That's the first time anyone ever thanked me for my time in the Army," he said. I now make it a point to say 'Thank you' to every person I come across who served in our Armed Forces. Freedom does not come cheap and I am grateful for all those who have served their country.

# Google's Masterplan for Healthcare

Dr. Bertalan Mesko, PhD

AI for medical use, cloud services for healthcare practices, apps for research – Google is everywhere in the digital health field. But the competition is fierce, and the race is still wide open.

## Key Takeaways

With 7% of Google searches – or 70,000 per minute – being health-related a good number of years ago, it was only a matter of time before the search giant aimed to be a healthcare giant. Google hasn't been particularly shy at expressing these ambitions: it purchased Fitbit for \$2.1 billion and has a dedicated healthcare offshoot from its AI branch, Deepmind. It is also the first company that publicly announced the development of a dedicated healthcare-specified AI model, called Med-PaLM. And as the variety of listed solutions on the Google Health page shows, the company has something to offer to everyone, from patients and caregivers to communities, and researchers.

In this series exploring the latest moves by tech giants into healthcare, we recently analysed Amazon and provided insights into the trends they are adopting. For now, let's turn our focus on Google's plan for the future of healthcare. Of note, we will treat Google, Alphabet, and Verily under the same umbrella.

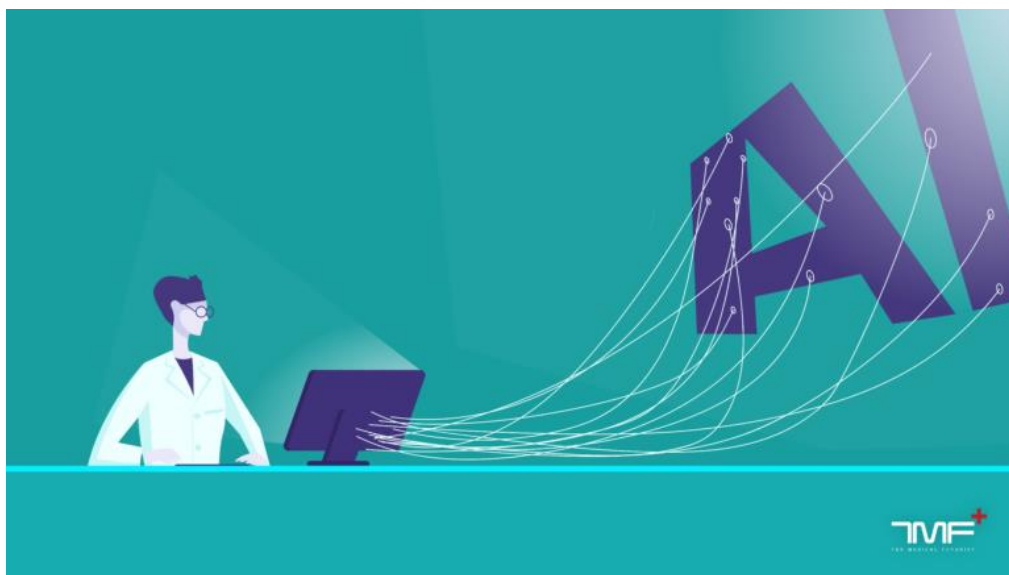
## AI here, AI there, AI everywhere

Google is probably best known for the algorithmic prowess of its search engine. But since it acquired DeepMind, it has intended to expand this expertise elsewhere, including healthcare. And its efforts are showing promise.

In August 2020, they introduced C2D2, a machine learning-based approach to improving colonoscopy screening. In the ensuing months, Google further put its AI as well as cloud computing expertise to use in new partnerships. In 2021, HCA Healthcare and Alphabet's Google Cloud announced a collaboration to develop algorithms to mine insights into patient records from the provider to improve efficiency and patient outcomes.

Also launched in 2020, Google's mammography AI system starts bringing in tangible results by now. Recent studies show that using AI to support radiologists in breast cancer screening can significantly reduce screen reading workload with comparable cancer detection efficiency as standard double-reading.

But of course, in 2023 all eyes are on generative AI. While Google may have seemed a little quiet during the ChatGPT craze, the company has set its focus on developing specialized models, like Med-PaLM, a large



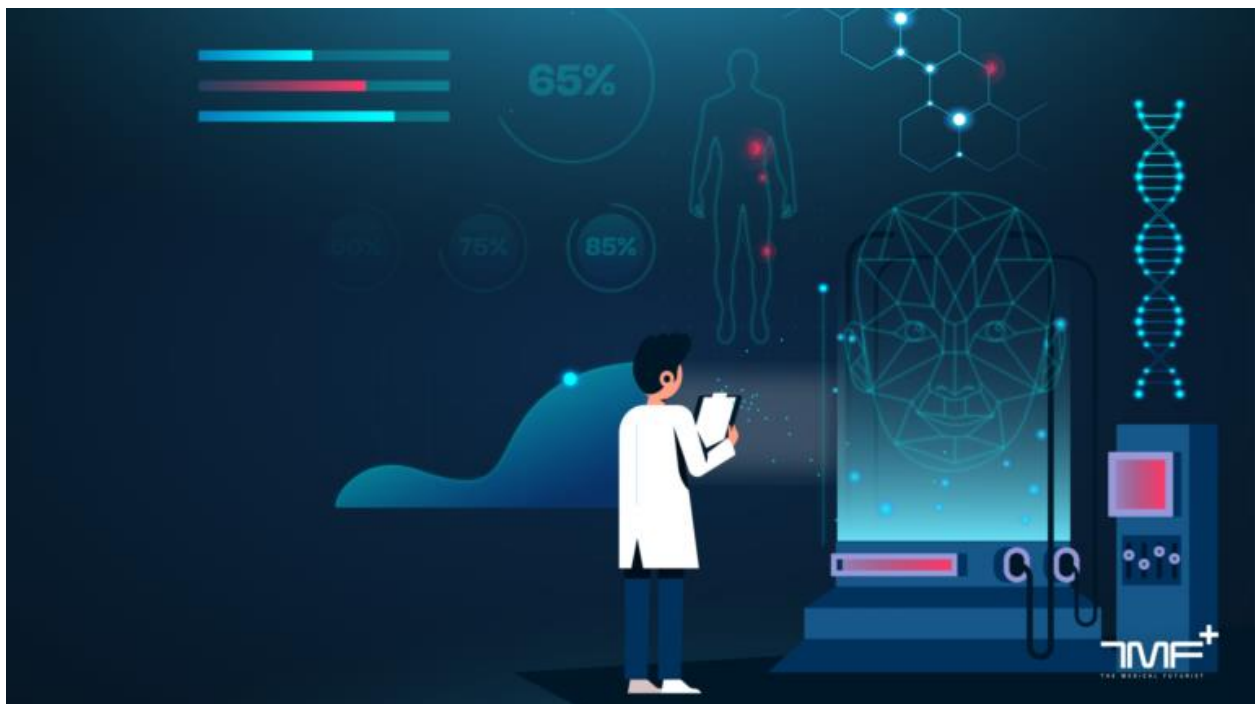
language model specifically designed to work in healthcare settings and showing jaw-dropping improvements in accuracy in its new, Med-PaLM 2 iteration.

The model was not released to the general public. In the first round, it was accessible to Google Cloud customers in the healthcare and life sciences segment, such as HCA Healthcare, Mayo Clinic and Meditech. A while ago Google announced they are expanding this access to a wider circle of healthcare players. In October 2023 Google also revealed a new AI-powered search tool designed for doctors and nurses. According to the company, the medically-tuned generative AI-powered search is able to mine various data sources, including FHIR data, patients' clinical notes, and other medical information.

While Med-PaLM currently seems to be the most advanced of large language models in terms of healthcare accuracy, Google faces stiff competition. Microsoft, for instance, has secured its place in clinics with Nuance's Dax and Dragon AI systems, tools used by hundreds of thousands of US doctors. When it comes to the cloud market, Google ranks fourth, trailing Amazon, Microsoft, and Alibaba. Nevertheless, the generative AI in healthcare race is still wide open, and Google has lots of tricks in its sleeves.

### **Google in the cloud**

Maybe not the largest player in the cloud market, but Google has promising initiatives, like this one, lending much-needed processing power to smaller healthcare practices. We already discussed in great detail how smaller healthcare entities will need cloud solutions to access advanced AI features as they won't have the means to invest in cutting-edge hardware that is able to run state-of-the-art algorithms. Instead of expensive hardware upgrades, the processing power is handled remotely, thus physicians can ask complex clinical questions and gain deeper insights, with evidence-based recommendations derived from analyzing datasets.



The Google-CareCloud cooperation does exactly that: “By using Google’s offerings such as Vertex AI and Generative AI App Builder, the company is developing tools to bring physicians at smaller practices the same AI-enabled capabilities that are increasingly available at large hospitals and health systems.”

## Research endeavours

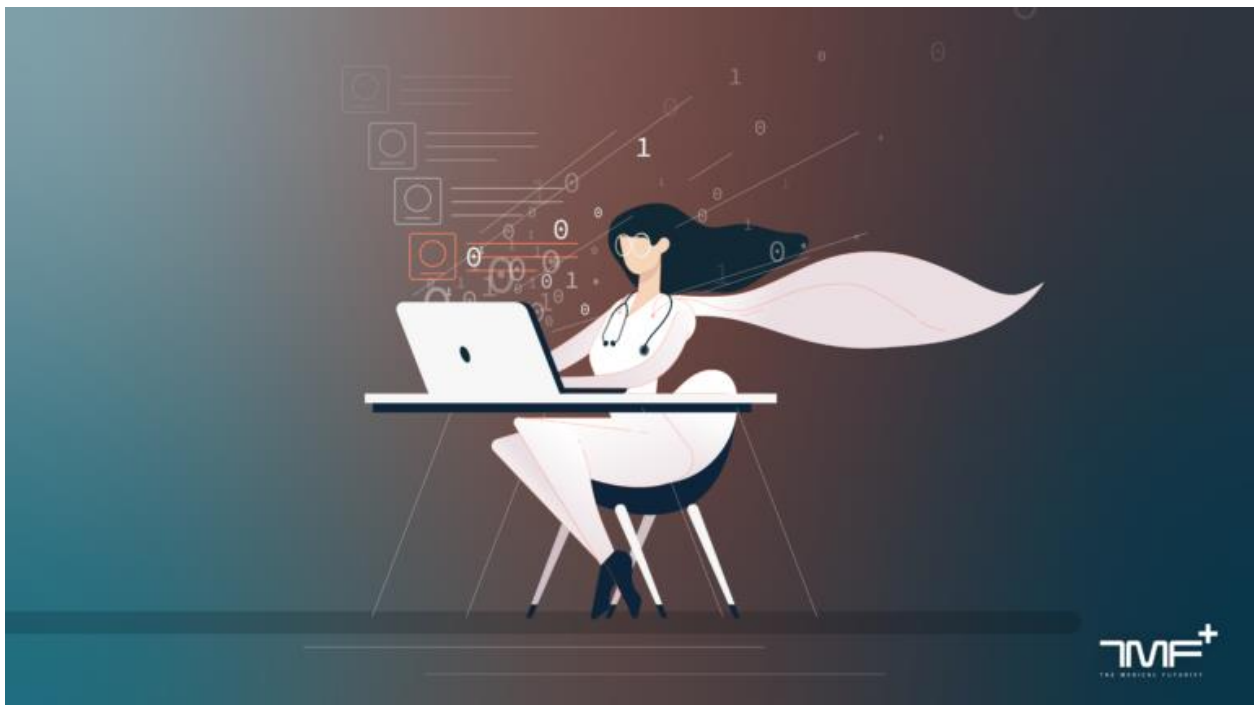
As it carried out research with its AI algorithms in healthcare, Google seems to have grown interested in broader, population-level medical research. In 2020, the tech giant launched Google Health Studies, an app dedicated to medical research. It allows any user to participate by reporting their symptoms, the steps they are taking to prevent getting ill, and if they've had relevant tests. Their first study was focusing on respiratory diseases like the flu and COVID-19.

This approach can help provide researchers with more relevant patient data and from a larger pool. But it also raises privacy concerns over the handling of such data. Also, recent user reviews are very far from enthusiastic.

Nevertheless, Google seems determined to move forward with medical research. They appointed Dr. Amy Abernethy, the FDA's former principal deputy commissioner, as president of its Verily branch's clinical research business in 2021. She leads the development of a platform for clinical trials and real-world evidence studies; as well as oversees Verily's ongoing clinical research projects.

## Point-of-care technologies projects

Just like Apple has a strong focus on turning patients into the point of care, Google is working on similar projects. In March 2021, Verily announced its partnership with Highmark Health for the Living Health Initiative. The latter aims to redesign healthcare delivery with a focus on patients. This collaboration will employ Verily's digitally-enabled tools for personalized chronic care management of conditions like congestive heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.



In a rather unexpected move, Google decided to revisit a healthcare area it previously failed to pierce into: health records. In April 2021, Stat News reported that the tech giant is working on a consumer-facing medical records tool to make it easier for patients to see, organize, and share their health data.

The move was rather unexpected because the company already had a similar venture that was shut down in 2012. Again, this is a field that has multiple tech companies' interest, for example, Apple has been working on the electronic medical records-health app integration for a few years, with mixed results.

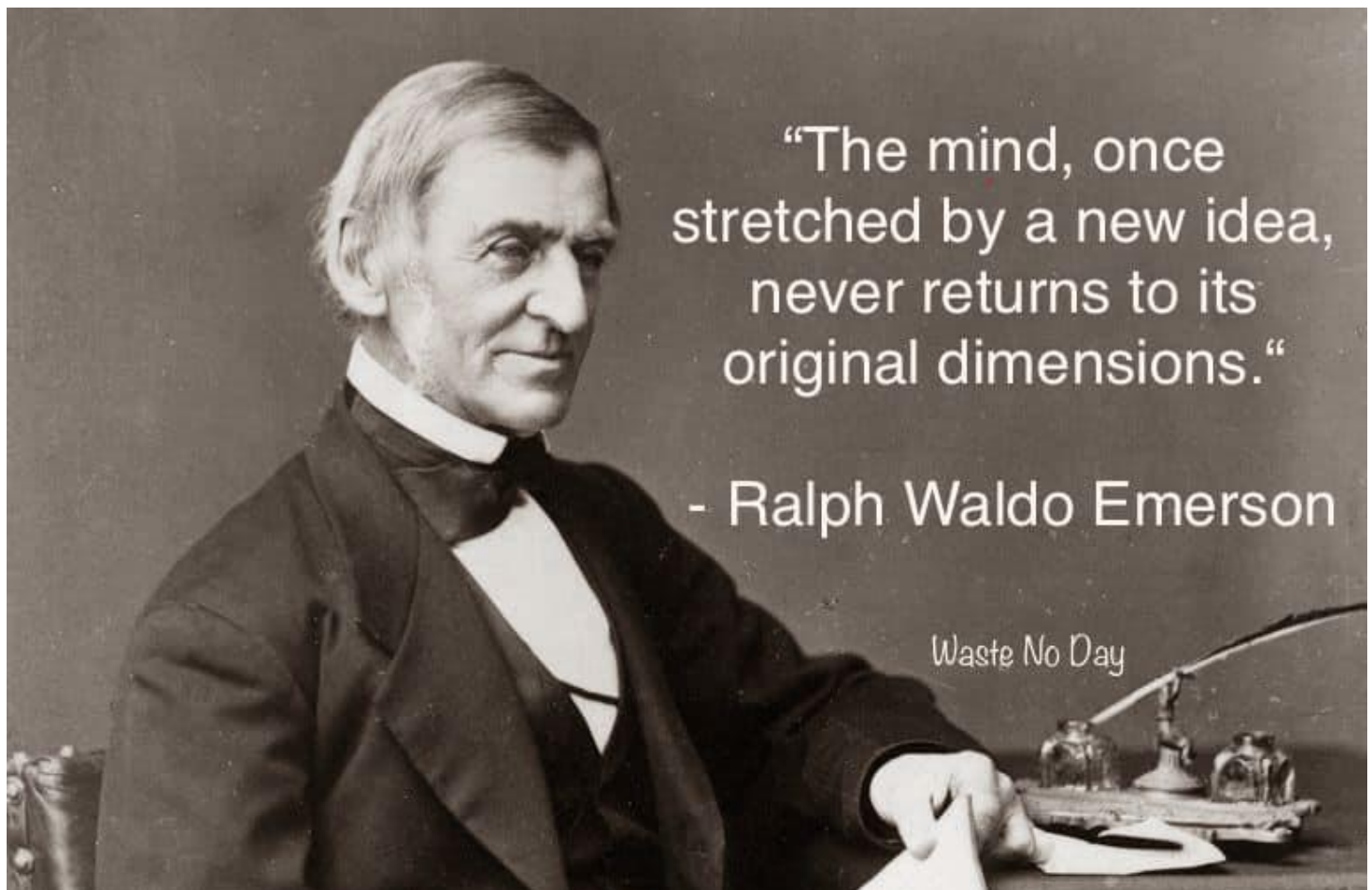
### Regulatory setback and refocus

Like its competitors, Google has also faced some setbacks in the past few years. The FDA rejected Verily's request to use its wearable in a clinical trial to monitor alterations in motor symptoms of patients with Parkinson's. The regulatory body did clear Verily's device to monitor ECG and irregular pulse but rejected the request for this new feature. FDA said that the device and associated motor examination "are limited in their capacity to evaluate meaningful aspects of concepts of interest that are relevant to the patients' ability to function in day-to-day life."

Business Insider released an exclusive report in 2021 detailing how the company has moved Google Health employees to other groups within the company. The Google Health branch will no longer focus on consumer tech, as this is mainly driven by the Fitbit team. With Google revisiting old projects, refocusing its health team's efforts and announcing new partnerships, it seems like the tech giant's healthcare plans are all over the place. But this might be because Google indeed wants to be everywhere in healthcare. However, the latest developments indicate that the most promising avenues for the company are AI, remote monitoring software, and cloud computing. But Google is also notorious for pulling the plug on even the most ambitious projects of its projects. The Google Graveyard is a testament to that.

So, it's safe to say that we shouldn't get too attached to a project set forth by Google, even if it could revolutionize healthcare. But we can expect the tech giant to keep branching out in various areas of healthcare as it aims to have a strong foothold on the market.

*Written by Dr. Bertalan Meskó & Dr. Pranavsingh Dhunnoo*





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## 2 Non-Traditional Thanksgiving Side Dishes

Zestfullkitchen.com

### Wild Mushroom Sourdough Stuffing (dressing) with Sausage



This Wild Mushroom Stuffing, made with ground pork, Swiss chard, sage, and a mixture of sourdough and multigrain bread is a unique and flavorful take on a classic Thanksgiving side dish.

#### INGREDIENTS

1 pound hearty sourdough and/or whole-wheat bread, cubed (8–10 cups)

½ pound lean ground pork

2 teaspoons fennel seeds, crushed  
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes  
¼ teaspoon grated fresh nutmeg  
Kosher salt and black pepper  
4 tablespoons unsalted butter or olive oil (I like a combination)  
1 pound mixed wild mushrooms, washed, trimmed, and sliced (such as shiitakes, porcini, chanterelle, and/or cremini)  
3 large shallots, sliced  
3 celery ribs, minced  
3 cups chopped Swiss chard or kale (½ a bunch)  
¼ cup chopped fresh Sage  
2 tablespoons chopped garlic  
1 lemon, zested and juiced  
½ cup chopped parsley + more for garnish  
1¼ cups low-sodium chicken broth  
2 large eggs

## INSTRUCTIONS

Heat oven to 350°F with rack set in middle position. Coat a 3-quart or 9×13-inch baking dish with nonstick spray or butter; set aside.

Arrange bread in an even layer on a baking sheet. Bake bread in oven until toasted and starting to brown, 20–25 minutes.

Meanwhile, cook pork in a sauté pan over medium heat until cooked through, about 4 minutes. Stir in fennel seeds, pepper flakes, and nutmeg, cook 1 minute. Season with salt and black pepper and transfer to a large bowl.

Heat butter and/or oil in now-empty sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms and shallots and cook until liquid is evaporated and mushrooms are browned 10–12 minutes.

Stir in celery and cook 2 minutes. Stir in chard, sage, and garlic and cook 30 seconds. Deglaze pan with 2 tablespoons lemon juice then transfer to bowl with pork; season with salt and pepper.

Add bread, parsley, and 1 teaspoon lemon zest to bowl with mushrooms and pork and toss to combine.

Whisk together broth and eggs then pour over bread mixture and toss until thoroughly combined.

Transfer dressing to prepared baking dish and cover tightly with a piece of foil lightly sprayed with nonstick spray. Bake dressing, covered, 20 minutes. Remove foil from dish and continue baking dressing until top is golden brown and edges are crisp, 30–40 minutes.



Let dressing cool 5 minutes, sprinkle with additional chopped parsley and serve.

#### NOTES

**PREP STUFFING 8 HOURS OR LESS IN ADVANCE:** Prepare stuffing mixture, transfer to baking dish, cover and refrigerate until ready to bake. When ready to bake, transfer chilled stuffing to preheated oven and bake as directed, adding 5–10 minutes more as needed.

**PREP STUFFING UP TO ONE DAY IN ADVANCE:** Prepare stuffing recipe through baking. Let cooked stuffing cool, then cover and refrigerate. Thirty minutes prior to serving, transfer chilled stuffing to a 350° oven and bake for 5–10 minutes until heated through. Broil stuffing for a few minutes to re-crisp the top if needed. Finish stuffing with fresh parsley as directed in recipe.

## Maple & Molasses Glazed Sweet Potatoes



## DESCRIPTION

Offering incredible depth from molasses, espresso powder, allspice and more, these roasted sweet potatoes are bound to stand out amongst the many other side dishes at the table.

## INGREDIENTS

3 pounds sweet potatoes, scrubbed and cut into 1-inch cubes  
2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for serving  
2 teaspoons kosher salt, divided  
2 teaspoons smoked paprika, divided  
Black pepper  
3 tablespoons pure maple syrup  
2 tablespoons molasses  
2 tablespoons whole grain mustard  
2 tablespoons fresh orange juice  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon ground allspice  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon espresso powder  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon cayenne pepper

## INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 425°F. Coat a baking sheet with nonstick spray.

Toss sweet potatoes with oil,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons salt, and 1 teaspoon paprika in a bowl; season with black pepper. Arrange potatoes in a single layer on prepared baking sheet, do not wash bowl. Roast sweet potatoes until nearly fork-tender, 20–25 minutes.

Meanwhile, in same bowl whisk together maple syrup, molasses, mustard, orange juice, all-spice, cinnamon, espresso, cayenne pepper, remaining  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt, and remaining 1 teaspoon paprika.

Scoop potatoes into bowl with maple syrup mixture and toss to coat. Transfer potatoes back to baking sheet and roast 5–8 minutes more, tossing every few minutes, until caramelized and tender.

Transfer to a serving dish and drizzle with olive oil.



**Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value.”**

Albert Einstein

Forbes

# Holocaust Survivor's Hidden Past: A Doctor's Discovery

GENE UZAWA DORIO, MD

As a medical doctor, I have peered into the lives of many patients who have unique experiences.

When I started practice 40 years ago, some of my patients had parents who lived during the Civil War; a few fought in the Spanish-American War, and more recently, at the Millennium, several of my centenarians could say they lived in three centuries!



One of my first patients in Santa Clarita was a gentleman who was taken to Auschwitz during WWII as a teenager ... and escaped! In his retired life, he lived in an assisted living facility, a building with senior apartments and a common cafeteria for eating and socializing.

I would visit him at his residence sometimes, with his daughter and granddaughter present. On his apartment wall were multiple awards given for community service in the Los Angeles area. As with many older adults, he was reluctant to reveal much of his background, some of it out of modesty, but also because his background held dark secrets.

According to his daughter, he owned a successful business and donated to those in need, ensuring everyone was given a chance. For years, he contributed to social organizations, enhancing educational opportunities for youngsters.

When I asked about family history, he became mum, not revealing the dark side of his background. Later, his daughter told me the fear instilled in him during his Auschwitz imprisonment still lingered. He explained to her that on the day of his arrest, he had already neatly packed a suitcase with his meager belongings. She revealed the rest of his life after his escape; he would wear long-sleeved shirts to cover the tattooed prison number on his left arm to hide the reminder of his imprisonment. His fear through the years affected him immensely, so much so that many past details would not be shared with her. How did he escape? She said he was part of a work camp and decided his fate was doomed to the gas chamber, so he knew he had to take a chance and flee.

This fear impacted his daughter as well, and to emancipate her emotions, she and her daughter visited Auschwitz. To their shock and surprise, at one of the exhibits on display was that suitcase he had neatly packed!

Even as his doctor, he never opened up to me about this past life. But I was able to ask about his philanthropy, and when I questioned what his motivation was, he looked at his granddaughter.

Sometimes in life, we have to take a chance, as my patient did, to flee. Fear can keep us from moving forward, but motivation for those we love can nudge us enough to enhance their dreams. Learning about people who may carry historic experiences could help us in the future.

Peering into the lives of my patients has provided insight benefiting their care and making me a better doctor.

*Gene Uzawa Dorio is an internal medicine physician who blogs at [SCV Physician Report](#).*

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# HOLIDAY TRAVEL TIPS TO KEEP YOU SANE AND HAPPY

*By Caroline Makepeace*

The holiday season is ahead of us, otherwise known as the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday seasons! It's the most magical time of the year, but possibly the busiest time to travel. Only the most fearless and brave will walk up to the airline counters and through those security gates. I bow down to you.

Me – the frequent traveler – will be cozied on down in mountains of North Carolina with my red wine and throw blanket after a couple of hikes and small town wanderings. You can have those holiday crowds.



But we're no strangers to traveling during the holidays, and to help you get through your next trip smoothly, we've prepared these holiday travel tips to keep you sane and happy. Travel during this holiday season is so very different from the last time we were free to roam in 2019, but as long as you follow these holiday tips, you're in for an incredible time!

## **1. Be Prepared. Accept. Embrace**

Enter the holiday travel season with the understanding it's going to be chaotic and possibly filled with problems. Accept this is the case and choose to willingly travel despite this. It puts you in a much better position to handle the lines and the delays.

You're already prepared for it. And you might get a nice surprise and not have the worst case scenario. Breathe deeply and use the long queues as an opportunity to catch up on emails on your phone, or swap stories with the strangers around you – helping them to feel at ease at the same time – make it part of the journey.

## **2. Consider Holiday Packages**

The competitiveness of the holiday season means you might find some great deals on hotel and flight packages. Choosing packages not only saves you money, but it alleviates some of that stress. You do need to plan ahead to find these deals, though.

## **3. Check Alternate Airports**

You can often experience fewer delays and get cheaper deals by taking flights from different airports. And it's not just on flights, but on rental cars and transfers as well. Check the flight prices from differing airports that you can fly to. For example, in New York City, it might be cheaper to fly from Newark over JFK. In the UK, for example, you might find flights to and from Manchester are cheaper than in London. You can always take a train or bus to the airport if it's a further distance. Don't always go for the obvious ones.

## **4. Avoid Peak Travel Days**

Sometimes this can be hard to do but when you're searching for your flights, click "flexible dates" so that you can find the best price and book your flights according to that period. Flying over the weekend tends to push prices up. If you can fly mid-week, it will work out better for you. And, there's usually fewer crowds in the airport.

## **5. Early or Late Flights are Best**

Most people don't like to fly at this time, so you have a better airport experience and experience fewer delays as well.

## **6. Leave for the Airport with Plenty of Time**

Even if you have an unusual surprise and the lines aren't long, at least you'll make your flight and you can relax at the gate with a good book. There is nothing more stressful than almost missing your flight. I once flew home from Austria via Munich on the busiest day of the year. I had two hours to get to my gate, and almost didn't make it.

I only made it because I begged the airport guy to slip me through on the fast lane of the security line and he only did it because I was solo and my flight was leaving in 15-minutes. The crew of young men who tried to follow me were denied and they would have missed their flight for sure. Being the holidays, you'll struggle to get on the next flight, or even get a flight at all.

## **7. Fly Direct to Avoid Possible Connection Delays**

If you can fly direct, do it. If not, plot your connection routes carefully and bear in mind weather conditions that might cause delays. It's also a good idea to pack hand luggage only when taking connecting flights, as this is usually where bags get lost. If you're worried about your checked bag getting lost, I highly recommend you get yourself a luggage tracker tag from Amazon, which sends a GPS signal to your phone and tells you where your bag is.

## **8. Avoid Airline Counters If You Can**

Check-in online and print off your ticket. Check your bags in curbside. Research beforehand to find out. If you are traveling internationally as well, sometimes this doesn't work. I couldn't do it flying home from Munich for some reason because of my United States visa.

**Important note:** this doesn't always work. It infuriates me when I check in online, yet arrive at the airport and have to do it again anyway to get my bag tags and then I line up for hours. American Airlines are pretty bad for this.

## **9. Reserve Airport Parking**

Reserve airport parking ahead of time to ensure a spot and you can sometimes get good deals online. But, do run the numbers to see if it's cheaper for you to park your car, or just catch an Uber or bus to the airport. OR, find a friend to drive you.

## **10. Travel on Christmas Day**

You can get great prices and some airports may just be the ghost town of your dreams. If the celebration of the big day isn't a big deal for you, you can find pretty good deals on this day. The same goes for New Year's Eve, as it's not a popular day to fly.

## **11. Use Your Membership Reward Points**

Cash in those reward points for flights, accommodation, or upgrades. This is what you've been saving them for! Do your research well in advance and book as soon as you can. It is the holiday season so many people may be trying the same strategy.

Be careful that you are getting the right value for the use of your points. For example, in New York, although we had Airbnb credits we could use, we realized we were better off paying for two nights' accommodation

that was decently priced, instead of using our credits. It was a \$400 difference and those credits would stretch much further in a cheaper destination. And, as we were out exploring every day, we couldn't really utilize the benefits of an Airbnb stay, for example, the kitchen!

## **12. Take Advantage of Crazy Holiday Sales**

Now, I am not a shopper, but I was kinda getting into it in New York with those insane deals. We saved over \$200 at Macy's in New York purchasing some good winter coats for all of us, and two gorgeous outfits for the girls to wear to the Lion King. We combined those savings with in-store sales, online coupon codes (which you can use in store) AND my Amex card offers.

## **13. Packing Gifts**

My best tip is to not fly with gifts. Send them by post instead, give gift cards, or have Amazon deliver them! Craig's Mum (in Australia) shops for presents at Walmart and has them delivered to our door. Or, just forgo gift-giving and focus on memory-making.

### **If you must:**

Don't wrap the gifts, security could very well unwrap them to take a peak. Pack and pad them well in your suitcase. Be sure not to carry on any gels. If you are flying internationally, be aware of the rules about bringing in food or plants. Most countries will confiscate them.

## **14. Pack Light**

It can be a bit hard with all that winter holiday gear. #theworst. If you can get away with just a carry on, do it. You can always buy things when you get there. For example, soaps, shampoo, conditioner and toothpaste are not essential to pack. I can guarantee that anywhere in the world will have those supplies in a supermarket – or you can book a hotel that offers free toiletries!

## **15. Be Prepared**

With snacks, entertainment, water etc. for your flight or drive. You just don't know what sort of delays you may experience. Better to be prepared. Get yourself a neck pillow, travel socks, eye mask and ear plugs. Be prepared to settle in, even if it's not a long journey.

## **16. Be Phone Ready**

Make sure your phone is charged and has all relevant phone numbers, itineraries, and apps installed. We love the TripIt App Pro version. It automatically imports all bookings and itineraries from my email into the app. It lets me know of any flight changes or delays and tells me what gate I am arriving and departing from – super handy if I have to do the mad dash for my connecting flight.

## **17. Take a Road Trip**

Better still, avoid flying altogether. Throw all the gifts in the car and as much luggage as you want and do it old style! You get more flexibility and freedom, less hassle and stress, and quality time with your loved ones, and it will often be much cheaper! Driving to New York saved us about \$800 in flight expenses.

## **18. Have Alternate Routes Planned If You Are Driving**

Google Maps is quite good in that it will constantly update and divert you from traffic so you always take the faster route. Another great app to use when driving



*Skyline drive, Shenandoah National Park*

is Waze, which is a really great SatNav app. Again, avoid peak times. We left on our road trip to New York on the Sunday at the end of Thanksgiving weekend. Hello, traffic jams.

### 19. Stay Local

Rent an apartment in a destination close to home with a bunch of friends or family and just have a cheaper and more relaxed experience closer to home. We love Staycations. Last year we visited Boone, North Carolina for Thanksgiving, Bryson City for Christmas fun, and then Beaufort on the Crystal Coast and Outer Banks over the Christmas school break.



### 20. Get Up Early

If your holiday travel is centered around exploring and visiting tourist destinations then get up early. You will beat the queues as most people won't get up early! We had no wait to go to the top of the One World Observatory and only a short one for the 911 Museum recently in New York as we arrived at the opening. When we walked out the lines were snaking around the building. However, we did arrive at the Empire State Building in the middle of the day (could not be helped) and we had an hour wait. It would have been longer if we did not have the Sightseeing Pass which helped us skip the ticket queues.

### 21. Get a City Sightseeing Pass

If you plan on visiting several tourist attractions in a city, then grab a city sightseeing pass. Not only will they save you money on attraction fees, they sometimes give you fast pass access. New York was the first time I used one and I'm now a big fan. City passes are the bomb.

### 22. Be Nice

If something goes wrong, just smile, be patient, and be kind. That's the best way to get help. No one is going to help you if you flip your lid at them. I understand why you might want to, but it's not the best solution. Be understating of the hell the person behind the counter may be going through if there are travel dramas. Sometimes it may be quicker if you phone the airline directly if you have a flight issue.

### 23. Choose Memories and Moments Over Possessions This Holiday Season

Trade the gift-giving for a memorable travel experience. For example, for many years we have chosen to not give gifts but to do something special on Christmas. We had Christmas Day in Victoria falls in Africa and Christmas in New York and experienced Christmas fun in New Orleans, Huntsville, and Myrtle Beach. And we'll never forget riding the Polar Express in Bryson City, NC. All of these are unforgettable holiday memories.



### FAQs About Holiday Travel Tips

Here's what people usually ask us about traveling over the holiday season.

### What should I do 3 days before my trip?

Three days before your trip you should check you have all your documents ready **and printed**. Confirm your bookings if you need to and then check the weather forecast. This will give you an idea of what to pack.

### What do I need to know before going on holiday?

You should know what documents you need to enter a country, such as visa, passport requirements (some require you to have six months validity) and insurance coverage.

### How do I leave my house when on holiday?

If you're worried about leaving your house when on holiday, ask a friend or neighbor to keep an eye on it. Leave a spare key with someone you trust and have them swing by from time to time to make sure it all looks ok. Or better yet, get a house sitter.

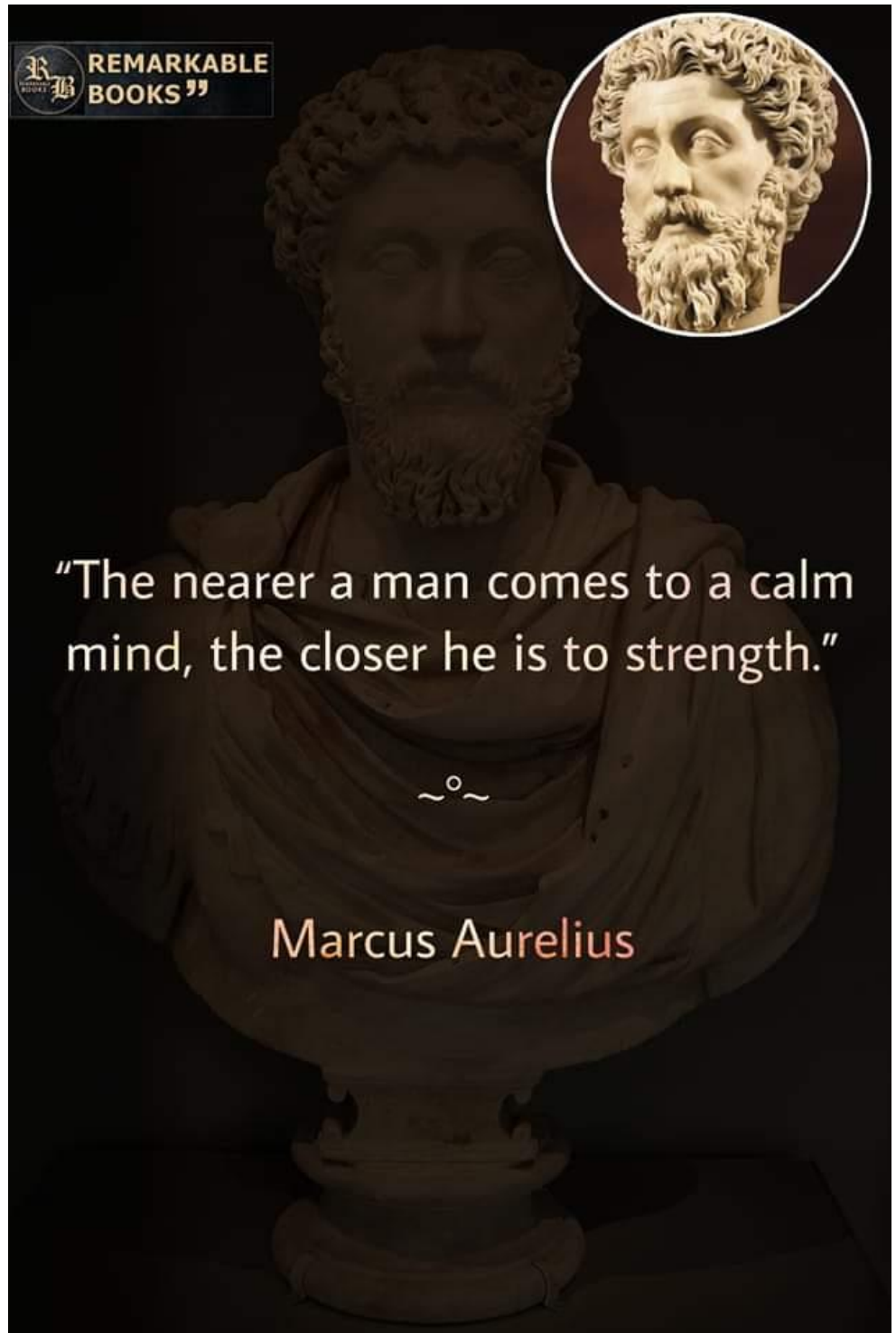
### What are your best travel tips?

Our best travel tips are to pack light; lay out everything you want to take with you and then half it. Travel carry on only when you can (it's cheaper and you won't have to worry about losing your bag).

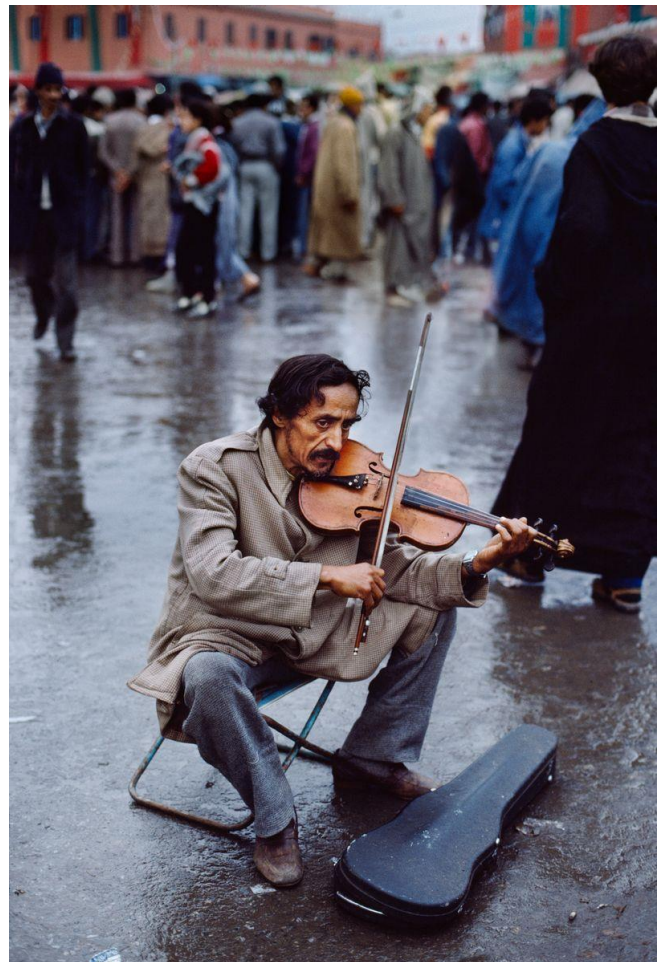
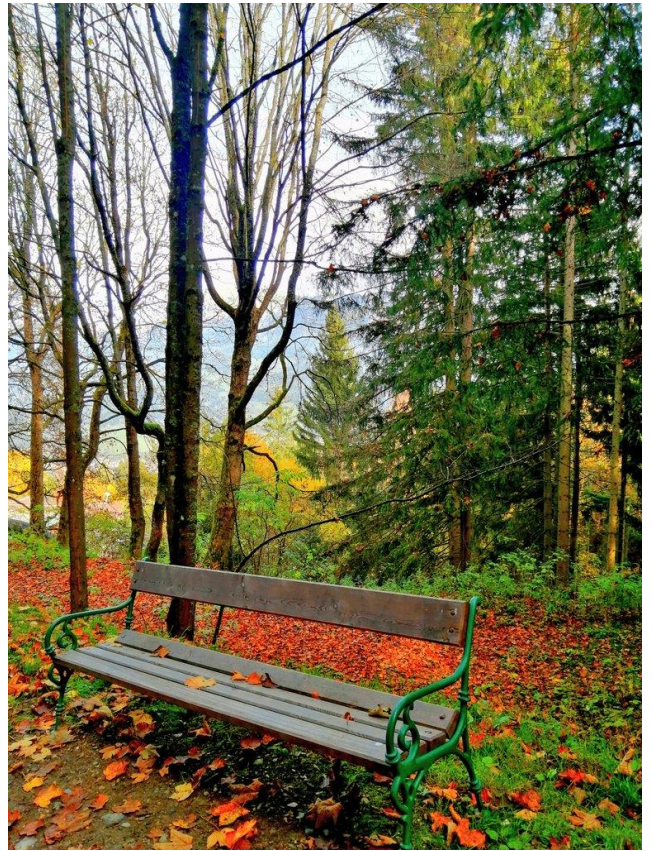
### Final Words of Advice

So there you have it, those are our top travel tips for traveling over the holidays. It might seem overwhelming and stressful, but it doesn't have to be.

Our main piece of advice is to **plan ahead with plenty of time**. If you're thinking of traveling last minute, you can expect chaos, but if you prepare in advance, it should run smoothly. You should also make sure you are well prepared, both with all your documents and your mentality.



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