Beware the Quicksand of FOMO

As I write this with the winter meetings wrapping up and the AAD meeting approaching (and will be over by the time you read this), I am reminded by how much we try to take on year after year, and the high achiever in all of us continues to fight back and appease our fatigue. But as the past journal issues and editorials have reviewed physician burnout and being better to ourselves, we should look at the tendencies that get us deeper into quicksand. Is it the inability to say no? To be more vertical than horizontal with our inbox? Or are we still blinded by rookie ambition and the restless dreams of youth that we just want to do everything to prove we can? Maybe there’s a blend of all of these that make us who we are.

Usually there is a list of references and articles that support these observations, but this time we are stuck with the reference in the mirror to tell us what to do. Our pacing and our methods of managing our time can, in the end, be managed by the same discipline it takes to get out of the quicksand…not with struggle but with strategy. A strategy for time management, saying no without burning bridges or FOMO (this is the new millennial term for fear of missing out that I learned at work), and the hardest task of self-reflection are the best approaches to release from the quicksand that we created for ourselves. Whether it is missing out on meeting, skipping one of our kids’ games, or denying ourselves that extra hour of sleep, we struggle in the quicksand of FOMO rather than take on the strategy of saying no to what is lower on the priority list. Of course, I’m also writing this on a day that I should have left work in time to pick up the kiddo and was 15 minutes late because I didn’t beat traffic.

Easier said than done, right? I wish I had some pearls of wisdom that matched the gray hair but that would make me a hypocrite since there is no question that I am guilty of all of the above. Let’s see if the chaos of the winter gives way to the solace of spring, or “meeting season,” as we say, and a relief from the struggles in the quicksand.

Disclosure: quicksand is actually a colloid hydrogel but don’t put it on your skin.

—Neal Bhatia, Chief Medical Editor