

## Is happiness contagious?

Research has proven it is—so why not spread it around

GROUP HEALTH FAMILY PHYSICIAN Chris Fordyce, MD, learned a life-changing lesson about happiness back in the early days of her medical career. “During my residency, a fellow resident and friend always came to work happy and cheerful. She made me smile and lifted my spirits. She taught me that we all have an effect on others, and that it’s our gift and our responsibility to make it a positive one.”

The contagiousness of happiness was actually proven in a recent study done by Harvard Medical School and the University of California, San Diego. It found that happiness can spread through social networks like a virus. The happiness of people you know, and even the people they know, can influence your attitude—and *you* can have the same effect on others.

Of course, you might be thinking, “How can I be happy? I have health problems. I don’t have enough money. My teenage son is driving me crazy. My mother is critically ill.” It’s true that we all have problems, and nobody can be happy every minute. But if you make a conscious decision to be happy most of the time, it can make a difference.

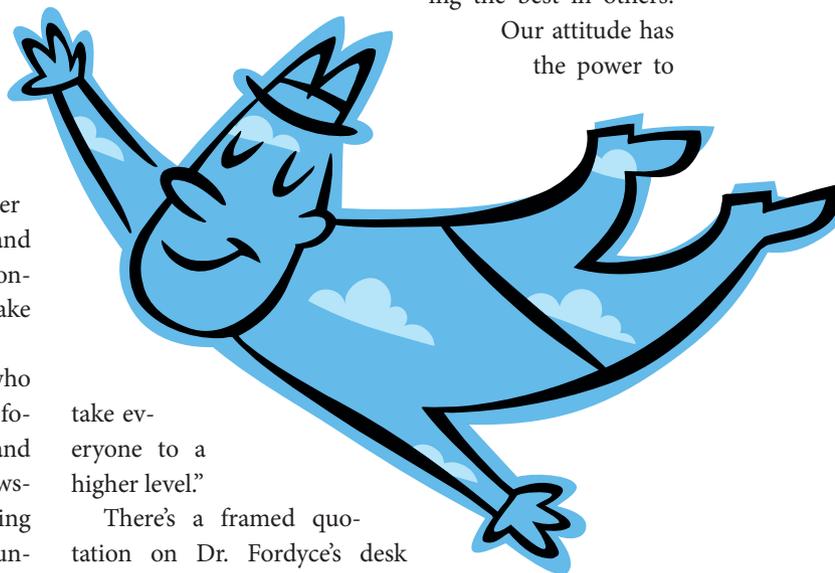
Longtime Group Health member Darlene Gertz, who has survived three bouts of breast cancer, could have focused on self-pity, but decided to spread inspiration and happiness instead. “I wrote a column for our staff newsletter for several years about employees who were doing inspiring things—like volunteering in Third-World countries,” she says. “And I e-mailed a positive thought or poem to my coworkers every day to remind them to enjoy the simple things in life.”

“Happiness is a choice,” says Dr. Fordyce, “and we get to make that choice every moment of our lives.” She encourages us to look at the events of each day from the most

positive perspective possible. Nurture feelings of gratitude, serenity, and forgiveness. Focus on feeling glad about what we have, not upset about what we don’t have.

Dr. Fordyce takes the concept a step further. “I recently read a wonderful book called *The Art of Possibility*, by Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander. It described how Michelangelo looked at every block of stone and saw an amazing sculpture hidden within it. The book discusses how we can all help each other find joy and realize our potential by being the best we can be and seeing the best in others.

Our attitude has the power to



take everyone to a higher level.”

There’s a framed quotation on Dr. Fordyce’s desk that reads: “Yesterday is gone, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift. That’s why it’s called the present.” She says it reminds her that we have amazing gifts in our lives all the time—even when we face huge challenges. —Ginny Smith

### GET HELP MANAGING YOUR MOOD

Someone who has depression for more than a few weeks, or bipolar disorder or another mood disorder, may be unable to improve their mood without treatment. Your personal physician or Group Health

Behavioral Health Services can help. In Western Washington, call toll-free 1-888-287-2680 for Behavioral Health. In Eastern/Central Washington and North Idaho, call toll-free 1-800-851-3177.