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Time Management for Cancer Professionals

Dr Gospodarowicz: Thank you very much to the organizers for inviting me to give this presentation on time management. I have no financial conflicts of interest, but certain bias. I use this opportunity to improve my own time management. So, why is it important? Today, there are many demands on our time and there are many opportunities to engage, to commit, more than ever before. And there's more and more evidence that increased stress is reported by healthcare professionals. So, in the next 30 minutes, I will touch on few concepts, ideas, tools, and examples of issues around time management. And my aim is not to give you all the answers but to help you reflect and stimulate some discussion. To start with a definition of time management. This is really a process of organizing and planning the amount of time that you want to spend on activities. And just a list of time management strategies that people have used, making to-do lists, prioritizing, focusing, getting organized are some of the strategies. One that I will reflect on later, is how to stop being a perfectionist. And why is it important? It's good to reflect a bit on why is it important. The importance may be different for each of you, but it may be helpful to ask yourself whether you want to manage your time better to be more successful, or just to reduce stress or to free up more time for leisure time. The learning opportunities are everywhere. And it's important to, also, while you're trying to be more effective, to reduce stress. I will also come back to the issue of self-discipline. From time to time, you will see this slide just to remind you to think of the questions that you want to ask me, and I will try to answer these questions in my discussion after I finish talking. Many people find the Eisenhower Decision Matrix very helpful, it certainly helps you to prioritize, and at times, to eliminate superfluous act. It, basically, organizes your actions into urgent and important. So, if something is urgent, important to do it, do it now. If something is important, but not urgent, decide to do it later and schedule the time. If it's urgent, but not important to you, there may be opportunity to delegate who can do the activity for you. And it's important to look at things that are not urgent, not important and figuring whether you can just eliminate them. There are many books, publications, expert opinions, of how to get things done, how to organize yourself. This is one of them, by David Allen. There's another book by Charles Duhigg of Power of Habit, author to how to do things Smarter, Faster, and Better. And all of these books can give you some ideas but self-awareness is most important. The ability to look at yourself and reflect on how you're doing. Look yourself in the mirror. And it's really insight. And we probably all are aware of people who lack this ability or choose not to practice it. There's a medical term for it, anosognosia, or more commonly known as lack of insight. So, self-awareness is very important. One of the way to getting ideas on how to improve your abilities is to look at the habits of

highly productive and successful people. Not all these habits will be appropriate for you but you may find some helpful and they're well documented and they're repeated in many, many publications. I find the writing of Rosabeth Moss Kanter, very helpful. She's a Senior Business Professor at the Harvard Business School. And I gave you a link here to her 17-minute Tech Talk that I'm summarizing here. And this is some key-steps to positive change, and what she says, if you want to do something, the first thing is to show up. If you don't come to a meeting, if you don't participate, nothing is going to change. The second point is to speak up. If you participate somewhere, you showed up to the meeting but if you don't say anything, nothing is going to change. So, show up and speak up. The third is to team up. Don't go with the I-did-it-alone. Find partners, find people to team up with you. The next one is to look up, which means to always aim for a better future, to do things better. This is a power of values. The next one is probably most important point that she makes over and over and over again, and it's power of persistence, which means don't give up. She actually has a saying that everything looks like a failure in the middle and she's very insistent that you just don't give up, if you give up, that means immediate failure. And final is to lift the others up. So, once you become more successful, bring your junior colleagues, your partners up with you. So, this is quite helpful. And you may think, okay, well she's just gonna tell you how to work harder. And the idea is not to work harder, the idea is to work smarter, as this cartoon suggests. And there are a few points of how to work smarter. I think that in our work we have opportunities to automate some of our tasks and stop multitasking, make sure that we manage our stress, do the work that we enjoy. And there is, I showed you in the first slide, that Parkinson's law, and this is another, more sort of humorous, interpretation of Parkinson's Law which says, if you wait until last minute to do something, it will only take a minute. And one of my colleagues always says that, sometimes, procrastination sharpens your mind because you have to complete the task immediately. It is also very important to confront some unconscious obstacles that may prevent you from getting things done. And sometimes, we were just not aware of that. But one of the ones that characterize as many of the health professionals and physicians is seeking perfection. And the Voltaire proverb is that the perfection is the enemy of the good if you seek perfection, you can never finish the task. But other things that you need to be aware of, is that physician sometimes faces, is needing control, desire to please. And the final one, that I am aware of, is taking pride in being overworked. It's very often, when you talk to your colleagues, when you talk to the physicians, the first thing that they'll always say is I am so busy and there's a pride in being busy. In fact, often our patients when they call us, they say, well, I'm sorry I know you're so busy. And maybe, we need to confront the fact that we don't have to always be so busy. While trying to be less perfect and more efficient, one needs to also reach a balance because you don't want your quest for perfection to lead to wasteful spending of time but you also don't want your quest to be efficient to produce shoddy work. So, the balance is the key that produces the excellence in what we do. Just a reminder to put more and more questions in. So, we can have a discussion, I'll try to save quite a bit of time for questions. Another important concept is that of building resilience. Our work in healthcare is not linear. Very often the work is unpredictable and full of pressure, and that ability to build resistance, which is resilience, which is the ability to adjust to adversity, maintain equilibrium, retain some sense of control over your environment and continue to be positive is very important. And here, is a cartoon from NHS, from UK, on 10 ways to build your resilience. I'm sure there are other ways to build resilience. But what is very important, is to have a network of supportive people, build your support network, to look at self-care and maintain perspective. You also have to choose your battles not to confront all the problems all at once and also, remember to learn from mistakes and move forward. Nobody's perfect, but practice makes perfect. We know that in other professional aspects of our life we can build resilience. It's also important to recognize the signs of burnout and not to ignore it. When you feel that you're losing it, you're getting angry at the drop of a hat. That no matter how tired are, you can switch off that you're getting sick, that you don't enjoy your job, and don't tolerate people at home. It's time to seek professional help. I think, it's very important not to ignore these signs of undue stress. And when you're just stressed and not totally burned out, there many stress relievers that you can use. They can be short-term, you can meditate, you can relax, you can focus on breathing, take a walk. There are some very fast-acting. Some of them are not available for us, right now, but getting a hug

from a loved one, creating artwork, aromatherapy, there are things that you can do. The long-term habits, of balanced diet, leisure, exercise, are also very important. And one concept that you may have heard about and it's very interesting, the concept of give-and-take, or giver-and-takers, that's been publicized by Adam Grant who is actually a psychologist and a business professor at Wharton school and a very popular author. And he divides the world in the givers and takers and matchers. But let's talk about givers-and-takers. Givers are people who are always helpful. They're always trying to help you. The takers are people who take your ideas without contributing much back and not acknowledging the origins. And you probably can think of some people like that in your immediate environment. So, Adam Grant asks, who is more successful givers or takers? And you can guess that it's the givers who are more successful. But then, he also examined people who are least successful, and they were also the givers. So, it was surprising finding that givers were also less successful. And the reason for that is they gave so much they never finished their own work. They contributed in help people but never finished what they were trying to accomplish. So, the lesson is, to be a giver but not to give unconditionally and not all the time. So, make the time for giving but also take the time to accomplish your own tasks and looking after your own career and your own time commitments. And so, the concept of givers-and-takers is very helpful. And also, lets us reflect into how we complete our work. And here, are some few helpful quotes from some wise people who obviously reflected a lot on success and complexities of life. Marie Curie was reported to say, "have no fear of perfection, because you'll never reach it." I've already told you the Voltaire, "perfection is the enemy of the good." And Albert Einstein, who I think helped us understand the world. Also, made the point that while you reach to simplify things and be more efficient. He says, everything should be made as simple as possible but not simpler. So, there's a limit and one has to embrace the complexity and deal with it, especially in healthcare, especially in medicine and especially, in oncology, cancer probably being one of the most complex areas of medicine today. And we can talk about some practical examples and I put some ideas on the slide of how manage time better, whether it's in your clinic or whether it's in committees. So, committees in healthcare very often take a lot of time and may not accomplish very much, so you can ask yourself, do I really need to be part of this committee? Do I understand the purpose? Do we need to meet as frequently? Am I prepared? What are my contributions and how can I contribute to make that meeting more successful? And you're in clinical practice. Very often people run very busy practices and sometimes, you're so busy you don't have time to reflect. You can reflect, why am I seeing this patient today? Do they need to come? Do I need to see them today? How often do I need to see the patient? Can somebody else see the patient? How can I make my clinic or my ward more efficient? How can my team be more efficient? What is their contribution? And are there opportunities for task shifting? In fact, task shifting is a big new area in health care where you can make the time manager of people who are very highly trained, sub-specialists, specialists, more effective by shifting some tasks for people who didn't spend 10 years training to become a sub-specialist and the concept of task shifting improves efficiency of healthcare today. A few words about meetings and some cartoons. People say you should meet only when absolutely required and only with people who are truly needed and you can make the preparation for the meeting, make the meeting more effective. It's important for people who come to the meeting to participate and to be clear what they accomplished, and what's next after the meeting is finished. And effective meeting management is something that, unfortunately, is not frequently instructed but in my own organization, the institutions' meetings are a big-time waster. And it's such a pervasive problem that Harvard Business School and others, actually, created the meeting-cost calculators. And they, basically, take everybody who comes to the meeting, take their salary, divide it by the number of hours they work to earn it, and look at their hourly-rate and put all those hourly-rates together in the calculator. And sometimes, you find that the meeting may cost \$500, a \$1000 and you ask yourself, would you pay actually that amount of money for that meeting? And the answer very frequently is no, you wouldn't, actually, do that because it's not worth it. Just a reminder again, to put the questions, think of questions that you have or the issues that may face, we will hopefully have some discussion. The other concept that I'd like you to reflect on is that you don't need to be in a leadership position to need to lead. You need to lead from within. And leading from within really means setting goals in your life. Leading by examples, questioning everything, asking yourself "are you doing things

that are right or just the things that are easy?" And one of the things that comes over and over again and people who are managing their time and managing their career well, is they're optimistic. So, actively rejecting pessimism, and looking at making the world a better place, surrounding yourself with mentors and teachers that care about you and also caring about the people that you work with and honoring them is one of the ways of leading from within. And this is a book by Lolly Daskal, talking about leadership-gaps, talks about 10-ways to simplify your leadership. So, just looking at yourself and looking how you conduct yourself and being able to keep your word, don't be cranky, forgive everyone, especially yourself. And this ability to forgive yourself will help you manage your time because, even after years of practice, nobody is perfect all the time. And those little bits of advice may help you looking again at yourself and reflecting. And then, again, a list of some personality traits of very effective people. Their traits are usually determination, certain level of self-confidence, but self-confidence is not the same as arrogance. So, it can be taken to extreme, again, optimism, ability to manage stress and build resilience, ability to persist in their task and not to abandon projects, persistence, problem-solving, the skill of time-management. We come back to the subject of today's talk which is time-management, planning, creativity and self-motivation. So, sometimes when you look at these they seem to be pretty obvious. But on the other hand, you can ask yourself "am I actually doing this or not?" And I'd like to finish and leave maybe 20 minutes for discussion, to say how you can take the task of time-management to the next level. So, there's lots of help on the internet. If you reach out to professor Google and you put in time-management, there are 4,200,000,000 results in half the second that appears. And as usual, with Google, the first two, three pages are the most helpful. So, learning is a big part of it. One of the things that is more and more talked about but still not practiced in our professional training is leadership training. And I think that leadership training is extremely helpful for most healthcare professionals but especially physicians because you, actually, lead all the time. You lead yourself, you lead your team, you lead your clinic, you lead your practice and having some leadership skills, which also include how you organize your time is very helpful. So, look out for opportunities for leadership training. Observation is also very important, so, observing successful people, observing people who have many jobs and are positive, are optimistic and actually, can manage their time and their priorities, it may give you new ideas. You can survey successful people and mentors, ask them how they manage their careers, get advice, and also get feedback and ask how people perceive you. And sometimes, when you ask how people perceive you the truth may be painful, but it's an opportunity to reflect and see whether you need to change or whether the people perceive you in the wrong way. And then final one is, make it your own. Each of us has different preferences, different things that are important for you. So, reflect on what makes you happy, productive and successful. And the last word is to find the ability to forgive yourself, your imperfections, and being able to move forward in your life and your career. So, with that, I want to thank you for your attention and maybe, we can go to you, Dr Narmin, and we may have also some questions from the audience today, thank you.

Dr Talibova: Dear Professor, thank you very much for an excellent presentation. There are a lot of information which were totally new for me. I would like to give you some questions. My first question about Decision Matrix. Urgency and important category can be accepted differently for different people in the same team. In this case, how we can apply to a Decision Matrix effectively?

Dr Gospodarowicz: Can you explain a little bit more what do you mean by physicians Matrix? Are you talking about the workload or work-hours, what do you mean?

Dr Talibova: For example, something is urgent for me, but not urgent for my boss and not urgent for nurses. In that situation, how we can apply this Decision Matrix where do we have to start.

Dr Gospodarowicz: I think what you're talking about is communication. I think it's very important to have open and constant communication, both with your superiors, with your bosses, with your colleagues, your peers, and also, with your whole, entire team. For example, if you're, let's say, you're on a chemotherapy clinic or something, it's important to sit down at the beginning and maybe look at the day and say here are the important things today, here are urgent things today, the rest is not urgent. So, you can all be on the

same page and understand each other. Many times, the conflicts arise when people don't understand each other's priorities and don't respect each other's priorities. So, communication is extremely important.

Dr Talibova: Important, yeah, okay. And another question is about time management problem, especially in developing countries, because we have some structural organizational problems and we are trying to manage our times but we don't have fixed, I'd say, time for patients. We don't have fixed time for, for example, meetings, how we can deal with this problem? Especially, it's more, I'd say, more problem in a developing country, because we know, for example, in US time is considered as money, spent money, spent time-spent money, but in developing countries, there is not good respect for others' time.

Dr Gospodarowicz: Yes, it's a bit of a culture shift, but I think, ability to look at your day and see whether you can be more efficient and be more effective together with your team and your colleagues is important. The problem that I know faces many professionals in developing countries is a workload and the workload is very uneven. But let me tell you the workload is very uneven in Canada too. We have oncologists who see let's say 500 new patients a year, when you have oncologists who see 150. And I think that it's important to be able to measure your workload, to compare it, and also, within whatever you do, to look at priorities. Sometimes, I will give you a concrete example. I used to have a clinic with prostate cancer patients and as you know prostate cancer patients have many lines of treatment and come back for follow-up for many, many years. And so, if you measure your workload by new patients and you accumulate patients who stay with you for years, your workload in your clinic-size goes up exponentially. So, you can ask yourself, "how often do I need to see patients?" Very often we see patients every three months or every six months. There is no evidence that four months is any different than three months. But if you change your schedule follow-up visits from every three months to every four months, that's 25% fewer visits in your clinic. It's from four per year to three per year. And that's small change, if you take it forward, makes a huge difference. But you need to see everybody every six months? Or maybe, every eight months? But if the patients are on treatment and you prescribe medication, you evaluate, you may have to see them. Then, you have to ask yourself, very often the patients see specialists but also their primary care practitioner. And it's a repeated visit. Can you say, "can we communicate better?" And if the primary care doctor has seen the patient then, maybe, I don't need to see the patient also on the same month, but defer the visit. So, just managing your practice and seeing whether you can decrease the number of interactions without compromising care and being as effective as you can be.

Dr Talibova: Yeah, good advice.

Dr Gospodarowicz: Use your team, very often, the patient will see a nurse and a physician and they'll be asking the same questions. And that, obviously, will take time. Is there a possibility to shift the task and say something will be done by a nurse and different thing by physician? So, to increase both, physicians and nurse capacity, by not repeating the actions. So, very simple tools that don't really cost any money, but this reflection of how the time is spent to free-up the time, whether you free-up the time for your family or whether you free-up the time for academic endeavors or new projects.

Dr Talibova: Okay, thank you, excellent advice. And we have a question from Snezana, maybe, the name like I don't express it right. I find it hard to say no, especially, on different academic tasks, committees, presentations articles. I would appreciate your comment on the power of a good and clear no.

Dr Gospodarowicz: So, you have to ask yourself, whether you want to say no or whether you want to... Which means you're gonna do fewer things in the time period, whether the time period is a day or a month or six months or a year, right? Or whether you want to be more efficient and be able to do more things within the certain time period. Because if you're already doing a lot of stuff it's easier to say no, because if you're writing five papers and running two clinical trials and having a hundred patients is much easier to say no than otherwise. And to be more efficient, I find that, sometimes, it's good to align. So, if your committees and your presentation and your papers are on the same subject then the preparation time is less. But if your

committee-work and your academic-work and your patient-work is disconnected then, obviously, it takes longer. So, alignment of your goals. So, some of the practices in breast cancer, let's say their main interests will be a locally advanced or inflammatory risk. And certainly, they will align their academic and their clinical practice and the committees together. It's not always possible but it, sometimes, makes you much more effective because the preparation time and what you need to know is aligned.

Dr Talibova: Okay, and I think it's also difficult to learn to stop being a giver, to have to learn saying no, it's really difficult sometimes, but we have to learn it to be more, to work more effectively. And I think there lots of doctors who wants to know, who wants to learn time management. If you could advise only one book, which book would it be to advice on time management?

Dr Gospodarowicz: I think that's really, really difficult because everybody has their own idea what's missing in their skill-set of time management. Some people it's inability to say no, some people because they procrastinate, other people have other problems. So, I think, you need to figure out the methods based on which skill-set is it that you're missing and then, read more about it. I think books are good. I actually don't tend to read many books because they take time and we have a lot of papers and literature to read just to keep up with progress in cancer, which takes a lot of time to find. And sometimes, if you just Google the issue, you will find a paper or an article or a slide deck or something that takes 10 or 15 minutes to read and consider that it will bring you ideas that you may find useful in your practice. And also, don't underestimate the ability to ask people who you work with. If you find somebody who manages this time really well and you find somebody who's successful, find somebody who you like, use good role-model to ask them, how do you do that? And most people will be very helpful. So, important thing is to ask people that you consider your role-models, that you ask people that you like, you like their demeanor or you like the way they deal with people, you like the way they treat people, because you're more likely to actually absorb the knowledge from them. Then, some people are quite successful simply by being quite ruthless and doing only what they want to do. You may not like that as your role-model. So, and find mentors. Mentorship is very important in clinical practice and your mentors can be your colleagues, mostly, probably, more senior colleagues, who are a little bit more experienced, but sometimes, it's your peers that can just reflect and sometimes, talking to your colleagues, and say "I'm so busy and I can't manage." And then, they will say, "well what do you do during the day?" And they can look from outside and then say, well maybe, you can stop doing this, maybe, you can do this better. So, sometimes even advice of your peer, your colleague, that's at the same level as you, may be helpful.

Dr Talibova: Yeah, and I think it's also important trying to be not excellent in all tasks. It's not important, we have to know it. And my last question. We know that more time at the hospital it means less time with our family, how to balance this, especially for doctors, for women doctors.

Dr Gospodarowicz: I think it's a problem worldwide. And especially, it has been exacerbated in our country during the pandemic. We are locked down in Toronto and many daycare centers are closed. And also, there's advice not to have people coming to your household and maybe, interacting elsewhere. And many women are working from home. A lot of people are working from home connecting and at the same time if they have young children that are not in daycare and they don't have parents, it's very difficult to juggle both things. I think, you know, building a sort of support network around you, because you can have your parents help looking after the children or your friends or you hire a nanny or the child is at school or in daycare. All those things are part of your support network, but building sort of extra support network because the child may be ill and you may have to be at work. What do you do then? Having sort of a number of options is very important but also, remember on the positives of having children and family, is when you're at work and you're stressed, and you're looking after a very sick patient that may be dying, you may have difficult conversation. Then you come home and you have to switch off to making meals or changing diapers, or dealing with homework, they say the change is as good as rest. And sometimes, having the home life and having other priorities may

actually be helping you managing stress at work. So, try to find the positive things about, rather than only the challenges, but also, find the sort of silver lining in having both, a family and a career.

Dr Talibova: Yeah. What good point to find positive things in challenging things! Thank you very much. There is no extra questions. Thank you for excellent presentation and I...

Dr Gospodarowicz: Can I ask you a question? What are your main challenges in your time management? Since we have a couple of minutes.

Dr Talibova: Okay. I have a lot of challenges on time management because we have a big workload and we have a lot of patients because I work at the National Center of Oncology which is the main Cancer Center. On my behalf, I have a lot of patients, but I totally agree after work, I feel relaxed with my children, with my cat. So, it was really hard for me because I suffered from burnout syndrome. I'd say, I take a psychology support but now it's more, let's say, easy for me to manage stress, to manage pressure. Especially in pandemic, I understand that most important thing is health and the most important thing is family. So, I try, to I'd say, spend more time with my family, it helped me.

Dr Gospodarowicz: And what advice do you give to your colleagues, that are just starting, about not getting burned out?

Dr Talibova: Don't try being excellent at all tasks. It's not important. Sometimes, take just, I'd say, one week or two weeks just for yourself. It's more important to spend time for yourself. It's very, very important. And think that everything can change. And we cannot be good academicians and good doctors, good women, good mother, at the same time. Of course, we will have a problem, we'll have a challenge and try to take support from your family, from your friends and take it easy, that's it.

Dr Gospodarowicz: So, I think it's very important. And many women in academic medicine may take a little longer to achieve their career goals, if they have children and they have family. But what I found over the years, that many women do achieve those goals, it may be that they don't become full professors in 10 years, but in 20, but they accumulate very important experience. And the stuff that I showed you what Rosabeth Moss Kanter says, never, never give up. So, don't be too frustrated that your career may take a little longer, as long as you're having fun, your feel you're making important contribution with time. I think women achieve as much as men and can have very successful academic careers, provided they don't give up the children grow up and then, they don't want their parents to get too involved in their life. You need to get them room and it's time for them to scale up their academic career.

Dr Talibova: Yeah, totally, I agree. And I think that time is not important, it's 10 years, or 20 years, it's important that feeling you're happy than feeling you are the best doctor. I think it's very important.

Dr Gospodarowicz: So, I think, if I'm correct, we're almost out of time and it's been a pleasure to talk to you and to interact.

Dr Talibova: Thank you very much.

Dr Gospodarowicz: Thank you.

Dr Talibova: Okay thank you, bye.

Dr Gospodarowicz: Bye, bye.

Dr Talibova: Bye.