An 8-step Approach to Reducing Moral Distress

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My personal 8-step approach to reduce moral distress when I am subject to a troubling decision or situation:

1. Acknowledge the challenge – give myself permission to see it as a challenge, and one that can potentially be addressed, without focusing on blaming.
2. Identify what the real threat is and its locus – either to my personal integrity or to my professional commitments/integrity, or both.
3. Discuss with trusted colleagues if necessary, and deliberately set that conversation up in order to maximize its usefulness and safety for all participants.
4. Try to understand why a decision was made and what the limitations were on the decision-maker. For instance, were there political imperatives, competing principles or values, competing stakeholders, knowledge deficits, major resource constraints, unaddressed power imbalances?
5. Try to advocate to the right people and using the right vehicle, always keeping in mind the need for decency. Remain mindful of the highest order objective or intention that I am trying to achieve (for instance changing hearts and minds rather than ‘scoring points’ on another person).
6. Then deliberate on and decide what I can and cannot live with to sustain my integrity as a person and as a physician (and perhaps as a colleague, community member, leader or follower). Are there measures I can take to mitigate the major offending downsides and to maximize any upsides?
7. Then act. And remind myself that sometimes simply accepting, and not acting, can be a valid decision.
8. Review continually, both how I am feeling internally, and the impacts I see on others and the work environment.

References Related to Moral Distress During the Pandemic
