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Make the Choice to Cherish your Voice!

As I make my daily commute this morning, I can't help but notice the natural beauty and calmness of the air. The blue mountain fog hugs the rolling green hills of the Piedmont and rays of sunlight begin to again following a weekend this past Charlottesville. The quiet Jefferson nestled in the Mountains has until college town known for quality public education, teams. This peaceful broken by the harsh turning "Charlottesville" on the weekend of August 12th, 2017. As a member of the Charlottesville community that was the unfortunate center of conflict, I was reminded of the **choice** that we have in how we use our unique voices.



shine through. All is calm notoriously violent summer in former home of Thomas foothills of the Blue Ridge recently, been a rural its natural beauty, high- and collegiate sports college town bubble was realities of conflict from a place into an event

Each of us has a unique vocal signature comparable to a vocal fingerprint. The voice includes defining characteristics of pitch, loudness, resonance, and clarity. The unique permutation of these characteristics is distinctly recognizable and closely associated with our identity. Similarly, we define ourselves and establish our personal identity with the actual words produced from our

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laryngeal apparatus. Much like the **choice** to use our voices to create unity or be divisive, we can choose to care for our voices by making overall healthy decisions.

As with our total body health, a vocally healthy lifestyle involves making healthy life **choices** and establishing positive behavioral interventions. Simple interventions such as voice conservation, hydration, and humidification allow the laryngeal apparatus to maintain efficient biomechanics. In addition, keeping our minds and bodies “in-tune” helps to maintain the same within our larynges. For example, many laryngeal disorders result from a mind-body disconnect, such as paradoxical vocal fold motion, muscle tension dysphonia, and functional aphonia. These conditions can often be easily treated by a voice-trained speech-language pathologist utilizing behavioral techniques including biofeedback, vegetative tasks, and mindfulness. Furthermore, the systemic manifestations of sicca and inflammation lead to chronic laryngeal injury that can be addressed by proper hydration and diet modification. For those individuals that are unable to resolve laryngopharyngeal reflux with diet modification a trial of anti-reflux medications may be required to avoid chronic laryngeal damage.

“Use your gift, your song, your musicianship, your *voice* to spread the never-ending cry for love.”

-Stevie Wonder

Making our vocal health a priority involves making the **choice** to eat healthier, quit smoking and limit alcohol consumption, which also have the benefit of systemic health improvements. Finally, the way we use our voices, has direct correlation with the state of our vocal folds. Phonation, even

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in moderate doses, leads to some vocal fold epithelial damage; however, with a proper amount of rest, the body's natural wound repair mechanisms restore the vocal tissue to its proper state. Therefore, a proper balance between environmental damage, voice induced trauma, and repair must be maintained to avoid cumulative injury. A negative balance may result in a variety of phonotraumatic lesions, such as scar, vocal polyps or nodules. Maintaining this balance is yet another example of a healthy **choice** that helps to preserve vocal health. Recognizing this critical relationship gives us the tools to **cherish** our voices by making the right **choices**.

In response to the violence of that weekend in August, the local community, Dave Matthews, and many supportive artists created "A Concert for Charlottesville". This event brought together the talented voices of Justin Timberlake, Dave Matthews, Brittany Howard, and many others choosing to deliver a message of unity. Stevie Wonder, a surprise guest, concluded the show, when he joined Dave Matthews on stage to huge cheers and smiled out over the packed stadium. He urged the crowd, "Use your gift, your song, your musicianship, your voice to spread the never-ending cry for love."

It is with this focus that we celebrate World Voice Day 2018 with the theme "Make the Choice, Cherish your Voice."

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The opinions expressed in this article represent Dr. Daniero's personal views and are not official statements from the University of Virginia or other professional organization.