

Fear and loathing on the front-lines of the pandemic



Jan. 5, 2021

By Nate Smelle

Looking back on the past year it is hard to imagine a scenario in which anyone alive is not experiencing what the media has labeled "COVID fatigue." While tiredness is a possible symptom of COVID-19, one does not need to be infected with the coronavirus to experience "COVID fatigue."

As with COVID-19, the only prerequisite one needs to contract this condition is their life breath. Take in a breath of fresh air through your mask, "COVID fatigue" is there, appearing as a glaze of fog on your glasses, clouding your vision. Stopping to pick up food or essential supplies and finding a long line-up of other people waiting to do the same thing, there it is. Coming across a soiled mask carelessly left behind on the sidewalk, the infectious exhaustion returns.

Whether shopping for essentials, walking your dog, scrolling through our newsfeed on social media, switching on the radio, or watching Team Canada defeat the Russian squad at the IIHF World Junior Hockey Championship, no matter which way we turn, the pandemic is there to haunt us.

Working as a journalist throughout the pandemic there is no escaping this chronic fatigue. Every day there is an updated barrage of numbers to process, which always seem to paint a picture of a future growing more grim as time passes. Keeping an eye on these numbers - the death tolls and case counts - lately they have been telling a story which underlines the urgency of the current state of the pandemic. The most recent statistics to grab my attention shed light on how the rate of infection has been accelerating over the past few months. For instance, six months after Canada's first case of COVID-19 was confirmed at Toronto's Sunnybrook on Jan. 25 there were 100,000 cases of the coronavirus nationwide. Since then (Aug. 1, 2020), Canada has added some 517,000+ cases to the national tally - 200,000 of which were confirmed in December alone. Throughout the month of December Canada also added another 3,604 names to the list of people who have lost their lives to COVID-19.

As depressing as it is keeping track of these numbers, for the most part, luckily I have been able to work from home. When I think of how lucky I am to be able to continue working under relatively safe conditions, I can't help but think of those front-line workers who do not have the opportunity to earn a living safely.

Speaking with several friends and family members over the Christmas holiday who have been working the front-lines since the pandemic first showed up in Canada, it became evident to me how this chronic "COVID fatigue" is taking a toll on people's mental

health. What I also learned from these conversations was how the source of the fear and loathing at the root of this condition was not stemming from a frustration with wearing a mask, physical distancing, or abiding by any of the protective measures in place to prevent the spread of the pandemic. According everyone of the front-line workers I have spoken with, the source of this societal anxiety and helplessness is coming from a small fraction of customers who insist on not wearing a mask, or respecting physical distance.

With this awareness it becomes our responsibility not to be a part of this tiny faction Hell-bent on spreading the coronavirus to as many people as possible.

On the bright side, while putting together this week's The Bancroft Times: Year in Review edition (Jan. 6), it occurred to me how the pandemic has now made every news-story, no matter how big or how small, a valuable piece of history. For the journalists and historians documenting this dumpster fire the onus is on us to ensure that we stay sharp, and record this tragic moment in history as accurately as possible so that we, and future generations, do not make the same mistakes again. In the timeless words of American author, political activist, and founder of the gonzo journalism movement Hunter S. Thompson "We do what we can, but the scales tell the story every time. Fear and loathing is everywhere."

Now, for the sake of our shared future it has become our duty to eradicate this intentional spread of misinformation encouraging people to disregard the science, and the measures in place to protect everyone's health and wellness. With this all-important task, there is no room for mercy or stupidity. The sooner we realize the value of the truth, and the potential for progress science provides, the sooner we can get started with building our future from the ruins of our past.