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A High Stakes Relay Race against COVID-19

The corona plague afflicted me with great force the last few weeks. While I count my blessings for each day of progress against this ordeal, my life has been irrevocably dented by the immense loss of friends and close relatives. In a period of two months, I have lost my mother, two close childhood friends, peers, four aunts, nephews and nieces.... why am I even still counting?

As a traditionalist, the hardest part of it all is the fact that regulations don't allow for our mourning rituals and paying of last respects in the manner and form that we know. So the loss is further deepened by a repugnant and piercing lack of closure. I am however, not sure what is worse; the poor burials or the fact that those who died often suffer alone in isolation with no loved one to hold their hand before their time hath come.

After having been generally unaffected since the start of the outbreak, in a matter of days, I too found myself bed-confined battling to catch my breath and constantly gasping for air, like an athlete ill-prepared for a high stakes relay race.

The experience has left me reminiscent, thinking of a time when I ran relay for the high school athletics team. Much like COVID-19, school sport wasn't something you volunteered for, you were thrown into it, and the only way out, was through it. The race is meticulously planned and executed, and somewhat of a marvel to watch. You have several teams of four running against each other. One runner finishes one leg and is required to pass on a baton to the next runner while both are running in a marked exchange zone. The critical skills required in this race are: strategy, teamwork, timing, stamina, determination, motivation, a fighting spirit and finally the ability to perform under pressure.

In our race against the pandemic, it is all of us running the race against the virus- we are one team. However, the odds seem stacked against us because there is no cure and the availability of vaccines has been problematic. Without a doubt, the expedient and timeous access to state-of-the-art medical and nursing care also remains key. Unfortunately, as a nation we have inherited a health system where disparities in the inequality of access to health care has been greatly exposed by the pandemic.

In other words, we are the underdogs and COVID-19 the favourite to cross the finish line first. The good news is that the underdogs often win. From personal reflection, I have come to the realization that the same critical skills required in a relay race, are

exactly what we need to beat COVID-19. However, to successfully combat the COVID-19 pandemic, we must have a “baton dream” and do this as a team, be it at the office, or simply at home within a family setting.

The reality remains, to win this race, each member of the team must play their part because the team is only as fast as its slowest member. The behaviour of the next person matters as much as yours. If the current gains in combating the pandemic by developed countries are anything to go by, than strict collective adherence to the COVID-19 regulations and to health protocols such as regularly washing our hands, sanitising, wearing our masks and social distancing, are critical self-disciplinary measures we ought to take very seriously.

My simple advice is, keep a positive attitude and mind. Take the vaccine and take your vitamins and immune boosters graciously. Walk at least four kilometers daily, take care of your mental health and don't be shy to seek for professional help if that is what you require. My experiences with COVID remains current and unfolding, no two days are the same anymore. I remain in this race, but to win it I can't do it alone. My family, friends and colleagues remain the other critical runners in this relay race. One thing is however for sure, this too shall pass.

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