

THE IMMEASURABLE TOLL OF COVID-19

WITH THE COUNTLESS LOSSES IN RECENT MONTHS, A SIMPLE HUG TRULY LIFTED THE SPIRIT, WRITES DR. NADIA ALAM



NADIA ALAM
Column

I saw an elderly man; blue plaid shirt, his hair a white cloud around his head.

He was standing outside an emergency department, his hand on the window, watching his wife; frail, coughing, waiting for masked health-care workers to take her through triage.

"Is this the last time I'll see her?"

I hugged my mom and dad.

I hadn't seen them in months because of the pandemic. But now, as case counts dropped, it became safe enough to allow gatherings big enough to include me, my kids and my parents.

Hugging them was clumsy, all elbows and chins.

We had forgotten how to hug, it seemed. But my heart lifted all the same.

The cost of this pandemic can't just be measured in illnesses, ICU beds, deaths, job losses, overwhelmed health-care systems and burned out front-line workers. There has been a human toll that we've only just begun to realize.

Mental illness has spiked. Isolated, afraid, faced with an uncertain

present and future, many struggle with newly onset depression and/or anxiety.

The incidence of domestic violence has increased. Parents are frustrated juggling home-schooling with working from home.

Teenagers, whose identity and development is shaped by their social circles, stare at silent walls in their bedrooms.

Loneliness has shot through the roof as people are forcibly separated from their usual social supports.

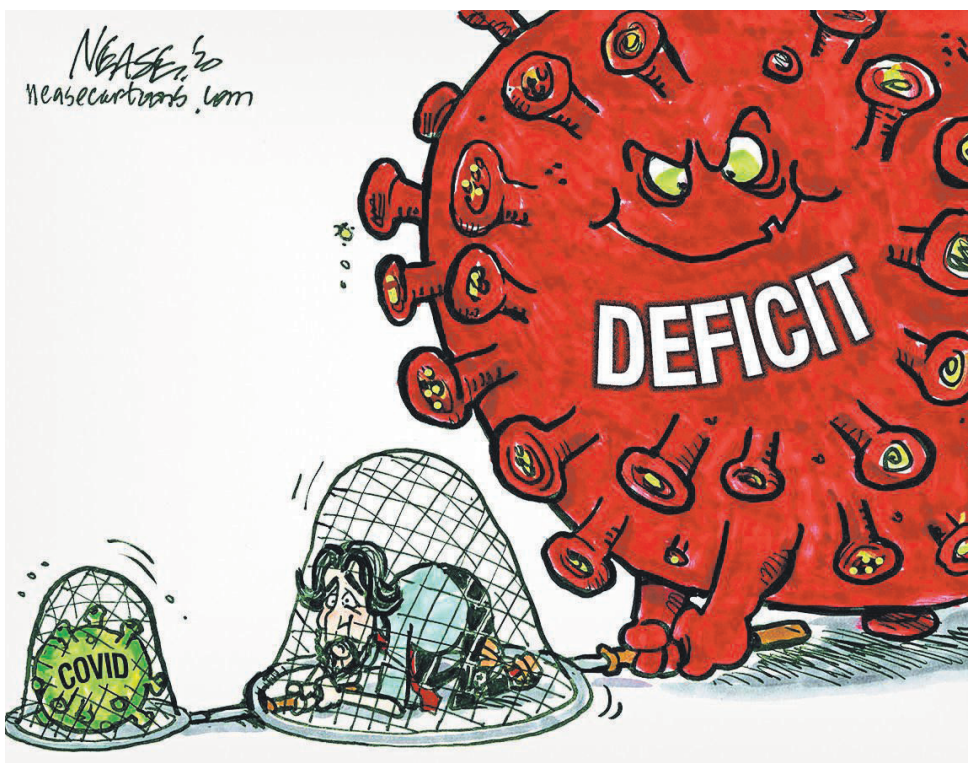
Caregivers and families are left unable to help, watching as their loved ones have gotten sick, sicker or even died. Alone. Apart.

Similarly, my patient watched through the window of the nursing home: her husband, short of breath from a COPD exacerbation, weakened from dementia, unable to understand why she could no longer be by his side when she had been there every day for 63 years.

As we work to get our lives in order, our health-care system and economy up and going, we can't forget the human toll of this pandemic.

A second wave will likely hit our shores this fall. We have a window of opportunity here to consider how, armed with knowledge and experience, we can and must do better the next go-around.

Nadia Alam is a Georgetown physician and past president of the Ontario Medical Association. Her columns also appear on www.drna-diaalam.com. She can be reached through her website.



WE MUST COME TOGETHER FOR ANTI-RACISM

DISCRIMINATION IS NOT WELCOME IN HALTON HILLS, WRITES RICK BONNETTE



RICK BONNETTE
Column

Kudos to the Halton Hills Alliance for Social Change for organizing a peaceful protest march. The Town and Halton Police supported this effort. Councillors Fogal, Farrow-Reed, Lawlor, Hurst, Lewis and I attended, along with about 1,000 others. Everyone wore masks. We heard from speakers on their experiences of systemic racism growing up here. Their stories were shocking and quite sad.

I cannot possibly comprehend how people of Black, Indigenous and other People of Colour are made to feel uncomfort-

able or even insulted while doing something as simple as shopping or going to the park.

As a community, we must be inclusive so as to recognize that discrimination, whether it be Black, Indigenous or LGBTQ communities, is unacceptable and unwelcome in Halton Hills.

I want Halton Hills, Ontario and Canada to be recognized as welcoming, inclusive, respectful places that celebrate both differences and commonalities. We have to continue coming together to be more than just not racist, but rather anti-racist.

PLEASE WEAR A MASK

Halton Region has now moved to Stage 2 of the COVID-19 recovery. More stores and businesses are open. I've been asked, "why haven't you mandated wearing a mask?" As mayor, I have no authority to mandate wearing masks. This comes from the premier and medical officer of health.

The premier has said he would not mandate

masks at the time I am writing this column. I encourage all stores and shoppers to wear masks, especially if you can't physical distance. Wearing a mask doesn't protect you from getting the virus, but it keeps you from spreading it.

Remember to wash your hands frequently and physically distance. For more information on the Town's response, go to haltonhills.ca. I want to again thank all of our front-line workers.

CELEBRATING SENIORS

June was Seniors' Month, and we celebrated our Hillside Active Living Centres in both Acton and Georgetown being open for 25 years. Thank you to former Acton councillor Gerald Rennie and Georgetown resident Lew Ward, who spearheaded the senior centres to become a reality.

Rick Bonnette is the Mayor of Halton Hills. Follow him on Twitter @RickBonnette1 and Instagram [rick_bonnette1](https://www.instagram.com/rick_bonnette1).

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