Aegrescit medendo

April 23, 2020 By Rick Nash

It's an old phrase coined by the philosopher Virgil, as the Latin would imply. Essentially it means the disease worsens with treatment, or the cure is often worse than the disease, depending on who is translating it.

It's a phrase which has defined my experience, and likely anyone else who has endured the reality of a serious medical recovery. It's a phrase I plan to have tattooed right above my liver, as a sign of my resiliency and endurance.

Earlier treatments of Hepatitis C were injectable interferon and its oral complement ribavirin, something which is still used around the developing world when Direct Acting Antivirals like Maryvet or Sovaldi are unavailable.

The treatment would require 48 weeks of my life, weekly injections to my thighs, and would send me into emotional rollercoasters as my hormones, and immune system ran amok. It was the sickest I'd ever been, for those unfamiliar with interferon, imagine your worst flu experience times a hundred. Because chemically, that's what happening, Interferons are naturally produced by your body to protect against intruders. I would only endure three months each time, but the pain and emotional trauma would take months and years to recover from. I would do these treatments three times until the last one nearly killed me, as my esophageal varices burst, causing me to projectile vomit a third of my blood on an ER floor as I'd entered it.

In 2014, the new DAAs for Hep C were more manageable, but I'd progressed further into End-Stage Liver Disease, so regardless of the ease of the treatment, it would agitate my condition. This was why it was riskier the worse I got, and eventually, in 2016, I became too sick to treat, and I had to wait for the chance to have a liver transplant, spending each day with a 30-60% chance of dying.

Enduring the eventual six treatments and a transplant to be rid of my Hepatitis C, was together my "cure" each step slowly brought me towards the place where I am today. Each trial, each exacerbated symptom, the literal blood, sweat, and tears from myself, my family, and my friends, the dozens of hospitalizations, the dozen near-death experiences, were a part of the process.

For those Spoonies (people with chronic conditions) who endure their treatment, if we're lucky enough to have something which can manage or cure their condition, we understand the reality of Aegrescit medendo.

When we fight a natural enemy, one which buries deep within ourselves, it takes great action to cast it out, and never does it leave someone the same shape as when they came in. And for those who claim it has not affected them, I feel for you, and if I were inclined to pray, I would do so as well, because it is crucial to acknowledge the limits and value of our power as humans.

And this new shape is not always so bad, because, for many of us, we find courage in ourselves, it can prove our resiliency and inner strength. Perspective allows us to understand how we look at recovery and to take the good with the bad, knowing that one would likely not have happened without the other.

Those of us who find courage, often do so by seeing each obstacle as a challenge we must embrace and overcome. We must feel the feelings we come across, the sadness, the despair, the fear, the anger, knowing that when we choose to embrace them can impact our progress, but knowing that the release of those emotions is critical to acknowledge the full effect of what we're experiencing. Sometimes it also means acknowledging and accepting situations where there is no good outcome. Life is not always good, and it is essential to recognize this, but it is our perspective which can allow us to embrace it and grow or ignore it and reinvent our reality.

There is power in talking about these emotions, if only to ourselves, at least. Talking about these experiences allows us to better comprehend their place in the larger picture. When we have passed an obstacle, the more we release and embrace the emotion with it, the smaller it can feel relative to our being, and the less power it has over us. Turning adversity into strength is what cemented our founding fathers as heroes.

The alternative to acknowledging Aegrescit medendo is to ignore those emotions, ignore the problem, and reinvent our reality to continue on despite the growing weight of ignoring the disease, condition, or the need for recovery. Doing so, makes these situations are almost always more dangerous, and I cannot help but see the parallels for COVID-19. Even though no cure has been developed yet, the uncertainty of the treatments' trials remind me of my experience early on with Hep C.

For those who endure COVID-19, and all other conditions, you are not alone. Together we will grow and learn from the experience of Aegrescit medendo. Because the cure is often worse than the disease itself.

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