

An Unwelcome Word

Category: Omicron

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | January 1, 2022

As an avid reader and retired teacher of literature and writing, I have always loved words. For example, “humdrum,” despite its mundane meaning, delights me with its rhyming syllables; “plethora” tastes like cotton candy whenever I say it. Yet, some words fill me with dismay or angst. I have always disliked the noun “pandemic” because my paternal grandfather died in the 1918 flu pandemic, leaving my beloved grandmother and not yet three-year-old father alone in a family no longer whole.

When the world changed in March 2020, the word “COVID” joined my lexicon of unfavorable words. Just as I was resigning myself to the reality that COVID and then Delta would not go away, I had to find the strength to deal with a new and more stress-producing word: Omicron.

Although I have received two vaccinations and one booster, I still cringe when the newscasters say “Omicron.” The word makes me ache, as if I have a bad case of the flu with chills, a fever, and pain from head to toe. It fills me with fear that all of my efforts to protect myself—vaccines, masks, social distancing, quarantining—have been futile; I worry that I will get Omicron and, because I am in my seventies, end up in a hospital attached to a ventilator.

The word “Omicron” also steals from me the sense of normalcy and independence I had slowly been allowing myself to embrace and enjoy. During my Thanksgiving trip to New York City, I had the courage to remove COVID and Delta from my vocabulary and to attend Broadway shows, eat in restaurants and stroll through Central Park with my beloved daughter. Now, Omicron is forcing me to reconsider my planned return trip to NYC in February.

I do not want to give Omicron power over me, to cause me to succumb to the anxiety that consumed me during most of 2020 and the majority of 2021. I do not want this word and all that it conveys to turn the seed of hope that I have felt growing inside me into a weed of hopelessness.

It is my fervent wish that Omicron disappears, not only from my vocabulary but also from my life and the lives of others. If it remains, then it is my resolution to let it not dominate me by further tainting however many years I have left.

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