

## The war being waged behind closed doors

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Little more than a year ago, it wouldn't have been a big deal.

In fact, it wasn't. It was almost routine.

Yet, when I got ready over the weekend, it was anything but.

Given the earliness of the morning hour, it would have been a simple matter of getting out of bed, hopping in the shower, getting dressed and going out the door bound for Newmarket.

This time around was a little bit different.

A mask? Check. Check. Check. Three, just to be sure. Some latex gloves? Sure, a couple of pairs just to be sure. A Health Card? Never leave home without it.

We're often told that it ? and I don't think we need to define what ?it? is these days ? is going to get worse before it gets better, but sometimes you have to hedge your bets.

Just how much worse is it going to get? Once the worst passes, just how much ?better? can we expect in short order?

As the weekend approached, the clock was ticking down on a long-standing medical appointment. Just routine, but it had already been put off once thanks to the pandemic. Rebooked at the beginning of December, I was fully prepared for it to be cancelled again due to ?it? but that call never came. The ball was in my court and it was a matter of weighing the options: head over to the hospital and get it over with in the middle of a surge or re-book it a few months down the road in the hopes that ?better? would be clearer in sight.

Without any degree of certainty as to what the next few months might hold, I resisted picking up the phone and putting it off in the hopes that whatever date landed upon was much sunnier than it is now. It was time to bite the proverbial bullet and tick that box on my ?to do? list that only seems to expand with each passing week due to all the things we can't.

The sun hadn't yet risen by the time I arrived at Southlake for my appointed hour.

I have to say in all honesty getting out of the car was not without its fair share of trepidation.

With our healthcare system taxed to the max, there was a strange feeling of fear not knowing precisely what to expect tempered with a vague feeling of guilt that I was taking up their time with something which was, in the grand scheme of things, relatively trivial.

But, in I went. Or tried to. The entrance I was directed to was dim, with very few lights on. Illumination was still a floor away by the time I got buzzed inside and a security guard pointed me to what I thought was an empty kiosk. A phone was nearby, maybe I was supposed to go over there, pick it up and await my instructions, as if I was in an old episode of Mission: Impossible. But, no, there was a person inside the kiosk, sitting in the dark, at the ready.

Curious, but the job got done.

Having covered so many events over the years at Southlake Regional Health Centre, it was even more curious to walk in the direction I was pointed completely on my own. By the time I reached the second floor, I had encountered no more than three socially

distant individuals going about their business, but I ultimately reached my destination, greeted by the people I needed to see who had me in and out, cheerfully, in little more than an hour.

When I think back on the anxiety, the unknown, and the infinite possibilities that raced through my mind on the trip to Davis Drive, it seems misplaced. My ultimate takeaway was the grace displayed by Southlake staff despite being under what seems like a never-ending barrage of pressure.

This early-morning Southlake encounter was brief as can be, even somewhat calming as the waves of anxiety and all the what-ifs washed away, but the knowledge that despite the sleepy, nearly-deserted atmosphere I walked into at 6.30 a.m. was undoubtedly in high contrast to a war that was being fought against the invisible enemy a floor or corridor away.

It was an unsettling feeling and a stark reminder that the way we conduct ourselves has immediate impact not only on ourselves, our families, and anyone else who happens to be in our immediate households, but very real impacts on the community as a whole, especially those who are working tirelessly day in and day out to keep us safe.

Perhaps it can be chalked up simply to COVID fatigue, but there seems to be a distinct shift in sentiment in this second wave. Focus at the moment appears to be largely trained on businesses, and rightfully so, but other areas of focus are all but falling by the wayside. Granted the ground is less penetrable during these winter months, but the lawn signs that were, for a window in time, a ubiquitous part of our landscape thanking our myriad frontline heroes have been packed away. Hand-made banners and messages of hope that once filled the windows and doors of countless home windows have left noticeable voids, and parades in front of the hospitals to support those fighting the good fight inside have largely fallen by the wayside.

The time for these shows of support is needed now more than ever.

Well, perhaps not the parades. In the lead-up to the holiday season, the local hospital said while frontline workers appreciated parades of support, a better show of community support for the work they do is abiding by public health measures and doing our part to stay healthy. That holds true now that the holidays are firmly behind us.

Whether or not you dust off your signs and decorations and poke them into your lawns or tape them back up in your windows is up to you, but doing our part, following directions and, when your time comes, getting your vaccine is the greatest show of support we can offer.

We may not see the battles being waged behind closed doors at our hospitals every day, but they are happening and our frontline heroes are warriors. With our collective efforts the war can be won.