

# Fall gloom, spring hope

Roger Ladouceur MD MSc CCMF(SP) FCMF, ASSOCIATE SCIENTIFIC EDITOR

Christmas is coming: a time to write a few words of comfort, a message of hope ....

I would really love to, but I do not find our current reality to be particularly comforting. This virus is spreading like wildfire. Millions of people are infected worldwide. Thousands are dead. As I write this, more than 52 000 are currently infected and 11 000 are dead in Canada,<sup>1</sup> and 57 million and 1.4 million, respectively, across the globe.<sup>2</sup> Among those regions that have been most heavily affected are France, Spain, Italy, and Russia, not to mention the United States and ... Quebec and most Canadian provinces in the last few weeks.

There is not much to celebrate!

And all these restrictions. Restaurants, bars, theatres, pools, gyms—all closed. Curfews. Gatherings, big and small, are not permitted. Gatherings of no more than 6 people. “Stay home” is the refrain of the day. And still no effective treatments and the desperate wait for a vaccine.

No, there is certainly not much to celebrate!

At the same time, mental illness is exploding in response to the pandemic. No one dares leave their home. People are panicking, anxious. Elderly people are no longer able to leave their apartments. People spend their days at home. With nothing to do. Binging television shows. Watching *Breaking Bad*<sup>3</sup>—not a particularly funny show—I did not laugh even once, which is obviously not the point. Or worse, *The Handmaid’s Tale*,<sup>4</sup> based on Margaret Atwood’s novel. Horrifying. Absolutely horrifying. Social chaos. Could this happen one day? With the US election happening in the background.

Even *Mr Bean*<sup>5</sup> seems gloomy to me ... that is saying something!

Obviously, things could be worse. Much worse, in fact. You need only read *Suite Française*<sup>6</sup> or *The Kindly Ones*<sup>7</sup> to realize that much. Our current situation was not caused by conflict, war, or natural disaster. At least we still have food, shelter, heat, and are able to communicate with one another. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, we are not so badly off.<sup>8</sup>

Suddenly, for no apparent reason, I am reminded of the story in *C’t à ton tour, Laura Cadieux*,<sup>9</sup> by Michel Tremblay.

The story of a woman who is depressed and obsessed with her weight, and who regularly visits her doctor to receive injections. On her way to the doctor’s office, she loses her son on the subway. She runs to the doctor

while her best friend searches the city for her missing son who is, in fact, safe at home. Laura finally arrives at the doctor. The waiting room is full. Always the same people there to complain about their booboos. Laura leaves without having been seen by her doctor. She will come back another day!

That was a time when family physicians were at the centre of many people’s lives. That is still the case today. Family physicians remain one of the few health care professionals equipped to care for the inhabitants of their towns or districts: children, adults, the elderly; capable of supporting them throughout their lives, from cradle to grave; who understand how to assess patients’ anxieties, discomforts, and diseases; capable of determining severity; who know when to investigate or refer as needed. But above all, they are among the few who are capable of being present, who know how to listen, encourage, support, and reassure. Especially during these troubled times. It is not surprising that so many people are looking for a family physician or cherish their own.

I am reminded of the lyrics of Christophe Maé, which we should all remember when seeing patients who are anxious or in a bad state:

Where is the happiness? Where is it?  
It is there.<sup>10</sup>

After all, things could be much worse.

Especially since, at the time of writing these words, the discovery of 3 efficient vaccines against COVID-19 has been announced.

Rest assured, things will get better. 

## References

1. Health Infobase Canada. *Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): epidemiology update*. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada; 2020. Available from: <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/epidemiological-summary-covid-19-cases.html>. Accessed 2020 Nov 20.
2. Center for Systems Science and Engineering. *COVID-19 dashboard*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University; 2020. Available from: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>. Accessed 2020 Nov 20.
3. Gilligan V. *Breaking bad*. New York, NY: AMC Network Entertainment; 2008.
4. Miller B. *The handmaid’s tale*. Beverly Hills, CA: MGM Television; 2017.
5. Atkinson R, Curtis R. *Mr Bean*. London, Engl: Tiger Aspect Productions; 1990.
6. Némirovsky I. *Suite française*. Paris, Fr: Éditions Denoël; 2004.
7. Littell J. *The kindly ones*. Mandell C, translator. New York, NY: HarperCollins; 2009.
8. Wikipedia [encyclopedia online]. *Maslow’s hierarchy of needs*. Los Angeles, CA: Wikipedia Foundation Ltd; 2020. Available from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s\\_hierarchy\\_of\\_needs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs). Accessed 2020 Nov 20.
9. Tremblay M. *C’t à ton tour, Laura Cadieux*. Montreal, QC: Bibliothèque québécoise; 1997.
10. FrenchVariety. *Christophe Mae - Il est où le bonheur (version avec choeurs)* [video]. YouTube; 2019. Available from: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whjM\\_WaWbFI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whjM_WaWbFI). Accessed 2020 Nov 24.