

Running on Covid-19 Time

By Noe' D. Romo

Running saved my life.

At every stage of my training, there it was, a faithful partner to guide me through high school, college, medical school, pediatrics residency, fellowship, and public health training. And just when I thought my training was done, there it came again, like a Yoda force ghost telling me, “Done with training you are not.”

Now during COVID-19 times of early mornings and late nights only further elongated by constant thoughts of patients past and those to come, there it was with every morning sun reminding me of what I had not lost.

Running to me has always been more than the simple interplay of the cardiorespiratory and musculoskeletal system working in synchrony to create a stride. Running is and will always be a form of meditation and prayer connecting me to all that surrounds and all that is, all that was, and all that will be. Running every morning during COVID-19 times provided a sense of normalcy amid the disruption and a sense of order amid the chaos.

But it was even more than that.

With every runner passing by, a simple nod and tug on the face mask served as a symbol of our shared joy even if for a fleeting moment during a time of grief. For that brief instant there were no codes to call overhead, no rushes to intubate, and no phone calls to make to family members at home awaiting an update. There, for a single second in time, existed a semblance of the brief human connections denied with the current times with two complete strangers briefly pacing alongside the rising sun.

Running during COVID-19 time also made me realize that this, like many other times, is not a sprint but a marathon. We cannot focus on mile twenty-six while running on mile one. We cannot expect to get to the finish line in record time without first making sure we keep the steady pace we trained for until the end. Running faster earlier miles will not necessarily result in an overall faster race, and may in fact prove to be deleterious and only prolong our arrival at the finish line. To quote the great Yoda yet again, “Patient we must be.”

Running, as it has time and time again, has provided me with perspective, solace and peace during these most challenging of times. Running during COVID-19 time saved my life and allowed me to help save others.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to move beyond New York City to devastate other parts of the country, the message to my fellow medical colleagues is a simple one: “See you on the run we are all on, alongside the rising sun.”

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