We can’t keep our distance — we must rush to aid those who are suffering

JULY 23, 2016

ON SUNDAY, after a run along the river — a practice that sustains my work with the homeless — I got a call from my mother, who said, after reading “Life and loss on Methadone Mile,” that her heart was aching for people served by our program. I felt a mix of emotions when I read the article: appreciation that the enormity of suffering for those in the throes of addiction was highlighted, and a fiery mix of anger and inspiration.

My anger is for people who are deeply stigmatized and, as was noted in the article, have little chance at accessing care in a broken system. My inspiration is for the collective awakening that is occurring in government offices and health care. There are evidence-based interventions for treating addiction, and with greater societal buy-in, our program and others will have a larger impact on this public health emergency.

I hope that our community will continue to turn attention to and exhibit bravery over the gravity of trauma and addiction. As my mother says, one must lean into suffering to imagine what was happening to Shaun,
one of the subjects of the article, who was drinking at 8 years old. What trauma has he experienced, in his early life and on the streets, that drives his desire for relief?

Let’s keep leaning in. In doing so, we won’t suffer even a fraction as much as those stuck in this devastating cycle.

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