

1-25-13 It was a wild year

So much goes on in a board of health office, there's no way I could keep track of it without daily notes. The spiral notebook helps for a while, with the date on each page, until I need to connect the story lines; then I start adding tabs with words on them for the topic or the person or the address. When a topic really builds steam, then it gets its own folder. It's a really big issue if I have to dedicate a notebook to it! Last year saw several new folders and there's one on-going notebook for a lead paint issue. Flipping through my just-filled notebook recently, before beginning a new one, I realized just how wild a year it was.

I'd call out to Peggy, "The guy who trapped the fox to bring to a wild animal shelter and didn't realize that the animal's head needs to be removed for the brain tissue to be tested: that was just this last year?" She answers, "Yes, that's right!"

"And why do we get the rabid animal calls just when the mosquitoes are gearing up with Triple E and West Nile virus?" "I don't know but it does seem that way!" responds the best administrative assistant in the whole world.

And she would know, because while I keep notes, Peggy keeps track and keeps numbers! Not only does she love to organize the world with excel charts and update the website, along with everything else she does, Peggy participates in the online method for tracking reportable diseases, called MAVEN. The old method was to receive a fax from a doctor or hospital and then we would fax it to our public health nurse. The papers were then filed by year. Seeing, touching, reading, faxing and filing those reports kept us better informed, to tell the truth. The new method arrives at both the board of health office and to the nurse automatically via a brief electronic blip. It requires that you log in and check various tabs and "buttons" to investigate further. It is great, though, for tallying a report with the touch of a button. And, so it was, that while preparing the annual report, instead of counting papers, there was an almost instantaneous report produced this year, thanks to MAVEN and thanks to Peggy!

Along with cases of influenza, pneumonia, food borne illnesses, there is a very concerning trend for many years now, seeing a rise in hepatitis C, both chronic and acute, and a rise in Lyme disease. The hepatitis is concerning and needs an educational program. One of the challenges posed by this debilitating disease is finding a way to reach the people who need it. Sadly, it is often contracted because of drug use, such as shared needles and is therefore preventable. But that's like saying drug use is preventable. That is not so easily accomplished. I'll propose this goal to our Department of Public Health's intern program. Here's hoping!

The tick borne disease numbers also rise every year. This is very concerning for a few reasons. I am sure it is under-reported. Doctors need to test for it. If they dismiss fatigue and joint as part of aging, then they are missing a diagnosis. I've had Lyme disease three separate times and never had the "bull's eye" rash. Thank goodness for my PCP, Dr. George Cuchural,

an infectious disease specialist. He is not about to dismiss or miss! He's the smartest and most compassionate doctor you could wish for.

Secondly, it concerning to see the rise because there are steps we can take to prevent tick borne diseases by avoiding the ticks. Visit Dr. Mather's (University of Rhode Island entomologist) website www.tickencounter.org/ to learn how protect yourself and your yard, how to remove a tick and how to get it tested. It was from Dr. Mather that I learned how to make my own "tick proof" socks, boots, pants, shirts and gloves by soaking them in permethrin and allowing the items to dry before wearing. The clothing can be washed up to five times in cold water and still protect me. You see, repellants are not very effective against ticks. The permethrin kills them. This method of "preventing the encounter" allowed me to not only be safer at my job but also allowed me to take walks in the woods again; something I had missed terribly.

Thirdly, did you notice that I said tick borne disease rather than just Lyme disease? I have to word it that way because here we are still trying to educate people, including doctors, about Lyme disease while there are more diseases spread by ticks cropping up, such as anaplasmosis, babesiosis, ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (Yep, even in Halifax!) STARI, relapsing fever and more! And they are traveling! The latest being discovered in New England, the *Borrelia miyamotoi*, was previously seen in Japan and Russia. Other ticks must have been jealous of the deer tick, for now other types are known to spread disease. They are traveling and they are sharing! Those curlicue spirochete bacteria inside the ticks are creepy; best to avoid them.

Be tick smart so that you can enjoy the wild without the wild enjoying you.

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA. You can contact her at 781 293 6768 or cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us