

When my youngest child, Joanna, was in kindergarten she asked me why were storms named after a girl and then after a boy. She and her brother, Eric, were in the back seat of the car and we were on our way home from school when she asked this question. I explained that they used to be named only after girls but some people thought that wasn't fair, as though only girls acted stormy. So, the weather people decided to start naming the storms and hurricanes after both girls and boys. They took turns, naming one after a girl and then the next after a boy. As I explained this, I was thinking, "They talk a lot about patterns in school. (They would look at triangles, circles, squares, triangles, circles, squares and they would catch on to the pattern.) I couldn't help but wonder if Eric and Joanna realized I was describing a pattern to them. It was a fleeting thought but no sooner did I think it, than from the back seat I heard Joanna call out, "Hey! That's a pattern!" Kids are so smart.

Epidemiology is the study of patterns in public health. Epidemiologists study patterns of disease, injury and death. They study these patterns over time and place and look for any correlation. Many of the causes of and correlations with disease have to do with human behaviors. Thus, epidemiology is built on the social sciences such as anthropology, sociology and psychology just as much as it is the physical sciences such as chemistry, biology, anatomy, meteorology, entomology and zoology.

Two geographical areas may both have the right climate, ecosphere and animal populations to support the spread of Lyme Disease from ticks. Perhaps in one area people do not go for walks outside and/or they pay people to do all their yard work, while in another area, or culture, people frequent the outdoors for pleasure and/or for work. The second culture is more likely to have a higher incidence of Lyme disease. Human behaviors created the difference.

Some patterns are foreseen but people don't take the necessary precautions. In response to frustrating increases of health problems, public health campaigns begin or are modified or beefed up. In that case, social psychology, risk communication theory and lessons learned from graphic design and advertising all work together for a successful health campaign. It's interesting stuff.

Some patterns are not foreseen. They just have to be experienced before measures can be taken or before conclusions can be drawn. Not in my wildest dream did I imagine that I would decide that I had no choice but than to walk away from my volunteer offer to work for the Plympton Board of Health before my "emergency" appointment ran out in May. That is what I have concluded, though. I have turned in my resignation. I won't explain.

I have recently worked to get my affairs in order. I am leaving some advice, some outlines of work to be done and some guidelines. I have also offered many forms and "SOP's, Standard Operating Procedures, mostly as worked out in Halifax where I have the privilege of working with wonderful staff and as the health agent for a wonderful Board. They are professional even when informal. They are my inspiration to continue in this work. I am grateful to them for their teamwork, their patience, their dedication and consistency.

My offer to assist Plympton still stands. I can come in on a Monday afternoon, for instance, and review the septic plans and offer opinions or suggestions where needed. I just cannot continue on this particular Board of Health in Plympton.

Whether or not my actions are part of a pattern remains to be seen. Sometimes things get worse before they get better. Sometimes change is needed before progress can be made. I only know what I can and cannot do and I also know what I am unwilling to do.

I recently heard Ralph Nader say, "Sometimes descent is the way to ascent." Or did he say, "Sometimes dissent is the way to ascent."? Or did he say, "Sometimes dissent is the way to assent."? When we hear people speak, we don't always know the spelling. Hmmm...Different spellings means different words bringing a whole new meaning to the quote. I think I know what he meant but if anyone sees Ralph, ask him for me, will you?

Observers of patterns: Keep observing. We need to gather all the information we can. When we can conclude, as my daughter in kindergarten did with, "Hey! That's a pattern!" then perhaps we can change the pattern and move on to a new and better one.

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