

POLITICS AS USUAL: "Just the flu"

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I hope that everyone had a lovely Easter. It was Orthodox (Greek) and Roman Catholic Easter on the same Sunday this year, so we had a big joint family dinner in celebration.

It was just wonderful (and my mum-in-law made a tray full of baklava for us, so I will be very popular at the office Tuesday!).

It was also wonderful because Sunday was the first day in almost two weeks I felt somewhat normal. I have been in bed for almost 10 days. Yes, folks, after years of bragging I had managed to avoid it, I got the flu. The flu!

I haven't had the flu in a very, very long time and, quite frankly, I had forgotten just how horrible it is. I equated the flu with a really bad cold. I could not be more wrong. It is a serious illness that can have significant health implications.

Why? Well, considering it feels like you're going to die for literally days on end, no drugs really help, you miss at least a week of work if not more, and then many more weeks of feeling less than yourself while you fully recover.

And that's just a regular flu. I was lucky. I had no complications aside from a lingering dry cough that makes it somewhat hard to breathe. Many people end up with serious respiratory illnesses such as bronchitis and even pneumonia.

?Just the flu? is not ?just the flu.?

I work in a university with thousands of sleep-deprived immune comprised students. It's a miracle I don't have the bubonic plague or something. Ah, but did I get the flu shot?

Nope. I never get the flu shot. I did not think I needed it.

I had every excuse under the sun. The shot only covers ?certain? kinds of flu so why should I get it? It doesn't work, so why should I bother? And my favourite? ?It's just the flu; I don't need to get a shot for that.?

I've missed a week of work. I can't afford to miss a week of work. So, yes, I need to protect myself in the future. I will be getting the flu shot next year. I have learned my lesson ? and at least it wasn't too painful a lesson.

Some families are not as lucky. Right now, there is an outbreak of measles running rampant across the country. Personally, I thought that disease was pretty much eradicated due to infant/toddler vaccinations that started over 30 years ago. Apparently not.

I don't know anyone who isn't vaccinated. We had all our shots by the time we were 5 or 6. All of my friends and family were the same. We were all vaccinated ? and glad for the protection it afforded us.

Not so today.

Today there is a sizeable enough group within the larger community that is not vaccinated and diseases long since thought either eradicated or under control are easily spreading.

Some people don't think the vaccines are safe. I can understand, to a point.

Yes, there will always be at least one person who has an adverse reaction. However, I would rather be one of the 99.9% and risk being the .1 in order to be protected against horrible diseases. I don't think any of us want to risk getting the measles or whooping cough or diphtheria or tetanus.

Some families are allowed to exempt their children from being vaccinated for ?religious? reasons by signing a simple waiver. I am not clear what religious tenets one follows that states that being protected from a disease is a breach of those tenets, but apparently some do.

Everyone is entitled to their religious beliefs; however, the spread of disease is a public health matter and a serious one at that.

Thus, Health Minister Matthews has stated that this coming fall, all children must have proof of up-to-date vaccinations or they will not be allowed to attend school.

I wonder if high schools and colleges and the university will do the same? It would make sense, but it's pretty doubtful.

Logistically, it would be difficult to see how all the records would be checked. Let's hope that they all had their elementary school vaccination.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is after all, Our Town.