

EDITOR'S PAGE



The Rains in New Spain (California) Are Not Mainly in the Plain: Of Weather and Health

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El Niño, that slightly warmer patch of the Pacific Ocean, has been blamed for everything that has gone wrong this past year. One thing is for sure; it has drastically altered the weather of the United States and given California its wettest season this century. San Francisco has had 39 inches of rain through February, which month alone had 15 inches.

From my office window high above Golden Gate Park, I can see each squall line coming in through the Golden Gate, until the wind and rain rattle my windows and obscure the view. As I write these words, another squall line is racing through the park, scattering pedestrians as they run for cover. For individuals who reside in "sunny" California, this weather is a great shock to all of us, who are so spoiled by the generally benign climate. The rains have inconvenienced everyone. Major freeways have been flooded and closed. Commute times have doubled. More serious events include high wave destruction of coast-side property and houses, mud-slide destruction of homes and property, widespread flooding of low-lying communities, flash floods, loss of trees and power, and multiple deaths due to drowning, falling trees, sinkholes opening, snow avalanches, heart attacks, etc. Of interest, the Board of Supervisors of the city of San Francisco entertained a motion to petition Mother Nature to have El Niño stop. They were too preoccupied, however, with discussions of the lack of the politically correct gender neutrality of "Mother Nature."

Naturally, the weather has been a topic of major discussion, and especially with the few patients who still brave the weather to keep their appointments. One such patient made a striking

analogy between the weather and his health, which prompted me to write these few lines. He noted that one never fully appreciated good weather until you lose it. In an analogous way, he commented that one never fully appreciated good health until you lose it. These true statements have a potentially enormous impact on much of us and our patients. This principle teaches us to enjoy every day to the fullest. Enjoy the good weather, good health, opportunity to work, family and friends, recreational opportunities, etc. As my patient friend pointed out, there is a capriciousness to the course of one's health that is very akin to the capriciousness of the weather. Myocardial infarction, hospitalization, sudden death (all of which he experienced) changed his life in a hurry. His automatic implantable defibrillator goes off occasionally, reminding him of the dramatic extension of his life, after each "sudden death." His zest for life and appreciation of every day is a marvel to behold and certainly worth emulating. His positive attitude is a tremendous example to all of us to savor the moment, and be grateful for the challenges and satisfactions of each day, including the weather.

It won't be long before the rains stop and the beautiful weather returns. Most Californians will quickly forget the "winter of '98" and bask in the sunlight that they don't fully appreciate. Others have lives more drastically changed by the capriciousness of the storms that destroyed their property or killed friends or family. Certainly, they will have a much different outlook on "good" or "bad" weather. For myself, I want to enjoy the "good weather" of living more than ever before. Maybe my patient friend had it right when he suggested that all of us should enjoy every day as if it were our last day on earth.

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