



## Terrorism

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By Eleanor Rodgerson, MD

**The terrorists we should all fear do not fight with guns and explosives.**

THE TERRORISTS WE SHOULD FEAR are all around us. Not airplane crashes, or bombs exploding, or tanks bursting. The marauders are out there quietly and subtly undermining.

What? Us.

Carl has a "cold," an upper respiratory infection. He is miserable, sorry for himself, but will make a sacrifice and go to work. He exposes a dozen co-workers to his infection which turns out to be a virulent influenza.

"Oh, my!" they say, "we just have to expect these seasonal things."

Mary isn't feeling up-to-par, but she thinks it her duty to visit her aunt in the rest home and give comfort. She coughs a little, a chronic "something," and the next week she is told that her aunt has pneumonia.

Mary also promises to take pictures, in the hospital, of the birth of her best friend's baby. She is welcomed by the staff and tromps in and out of the delivery room getting the proper angle. Later, the new mother runs a fever and both she and the baby are miserable with a malaise for several days.

"Oh, my!" they say. "Institutions aren't safe anymore."

Bob goes to a swinging party one weekend and a few months later, during a routine checkup, a test is positive for HIV. He isn't feeling sick, but his future is bleak because the drugs meant to control his viruses have lost their effectiveness.

"Oh, my!" they say, "poor Bob, so unfortunate. We must keep his trouble secret and support him." Meanwhile, the disease is spread and millions die in a raging epidemic.

With the use of antibiotics, the presence of the bacteria and viruses are almost considered minor. They are known to be present, they have been seen, photographed and dissected. They can be controlled. No one thought they would fight back and fight successfully.

The past tuberculosis sanitarium are long gone and the drugs used instead are not as effective as they once were. Active cases are not isolated and tuberculosis is on the increase. So also are syphilis and gonorrhea.

The organisms are clever. They mutate, they produce toxins, they destroy immunity, they fight for their right to life. They are universal. Researchers now find them in stomach ulcers and suspect them in atherosclerotic plaques.

They have been on the earth millions of years before humans and may last longer. The good ones help keep humans alive; the bad, the pathological, take every opportunity to capitalize on carelessness.

True terror is perpetual, and combating it requires endless watchfulness in everyday living.

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