

We Are All Affected

By Dr. Molly Rossignol

Abraham Verghese, MD, infectious disease specialist and physician author, was the editorial contributor in JAMA ([Writing Medicine](#), May 5, 2020; vol 323, no 17) in which he describes the writing contributions that physicians offer to the world of literature. He cites Goodman and Gilman's Pharmacology text. In fact, this was one of my favorite books in medical school. I appreciate Dr. Verghese pointing this out, as I too, heard the author's voice as I learned about drug interactions.

Several of my favorite (reading) books were written by Dr. Verghese. [The Tennis Partner](#) is a true story about his friendship with a resident physician, David. Dr. Verghese was managing a recent divorce and being a single dad some weekends and otherwise feeling untethered as a new attending physician in El Paso, TX. David becomes his tennis partner, having been a tennis pro earlier in life. David also has a substance use disorder. The relationship is an example of respect and mutual gratitude for one another. Dr. Verghese describes what playing tennis did for him and David: "their opportunity to impose ORDER on a world that was fickle and capricious." Then his reflection: "This ORDER feeling of mastery would linger for a few days then wane. The urge to meet and play would build again" (a literary description of craving). He does a superb job of detailing the course of David's illness. How it wound itself, unsolicited but tightly around all those affected in the hospital and many in the community of El Paso.

The novel concludes with Dr. Verghese's reflections on the impact that such a unique and amazing individual had on so many, not least himself. He describes the loss of someone to the illness of addiction so vividly that in reading a few sentences, others can't help but feel the anguish. The emotion a wonderful writer can evoke. I thank Dr. Verghese for this piece of work. For describing the joys and sadness those who work in medicine, and addiction in particular, can identify with.

In offering this piece to the NHMS Member's Corner, I encourage all of us to use writing as a tool to express our connections and to help us all heal from the issues we face day to day.

I also want to practically introduce or re-introduce the [New Hampshire Professionals Health Program](#). Dr. Verghese and David are not the rare pair of friends/colleagues who have to deal with this complex debilitating illness. So many are affected by this. Lives and careers are effectively "rollercoastered" and often times destroyed. Please reach out if you or someone you know needs help with drug or alcohol use, burn out issues or other potentially career impairing conditions. [Molly Rossignol, DO](#) - Medical Director NHPHP at 603-491-5036.