

OUR VIEW

Breaking the silence about opioid epidemic

Every day we get the latest on the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. How many people tested positive, and how many have died. The numbers roll higher and higher every day as our political leaders struggle to find a way to slow its spread.

But there's another, more deadly, epidemic that has swept across the United States over the past decade: opioids. Call it the Quiet Epidemic.

While newspapers and other media have reported on its impact on urban America, reporting on its impact on rural counterpart has been all but missing.

Yet, between 2008 and 2017, nearly 274,000 Americans died in the rural U.S. In the rural Pacific Northwest, 1,347 have died.

Nationwide, a survey found that 3 in every 4 farmers and farmworkers have been directly impacted by opioid abuse. Even worse, the same percentage reports that it is easy to access large amounts of opioids without a prescription — but only one-third say it is easy to obtain addiction treatment.

Those are stunning statistics, yet few are willing to talk about it.

In much of rural America, the stigma of a "drug overdose" creates a bubble of



Gado Images/Associated Press, File

Opioids are pain relievers. If improperly prescribed or abused, they can lead to a downward spiral of addiction.

silence around the victim, the family and the community.

To address a problem, we first need to talk about it.

That was the realization leaders of the American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Farmers Union came to. Those

two organizations rarely find themselves on the same side of a political issue, but when it comes to the matter of saving rural lives from opioids, they speak as one.

Together, they launched "Farm Town Strong," a campaign aimed at breaking the silence. Their website, farmtownstrong.org,

offers help to families and others who are impacted by opioids.

The tendency is to think about opioids in terms of teens and young adults experimenting with illicit drugs, such as fentanyl, but there's more to the story.

It is common for people who do hard physical labor to be injured. When that happens, doctors prescribe pain relievers, many that have an opioid as an ingredient. If the injury persists, so does the prescription, until the patient is hooked.

From there, the patient can become trapped in a downward spiral. Without help, he, or she, is doomed.

Opioids are not the only drugs threatening rural America. Methamphetamines continue to pose a huge problem. Other addictive substances, including alcohol, add to the potential for rural Americans to become caught up in a web of problems.

Farmers and ranchers tend to be independent thinkers. They are also self-reliant, an asset in the world of agriculture.

But sometimes a problem arises that can overwhelm even the most independent person or family. When that happens, it's OK to talk about it with a neighbor, or a friend, or a counselor.

It's OK to seek help.

OTHER VIEWS

Curmudgeonly ruminations about the future of humankind

Editor's note: Do you have a point you'd like to make or an issue you feel strongly about? Submit a letter to the editor or a guest column.

Concerning the situation of global warming, climate change, creation of toxic environments, pollution, contamination, and similar large concerns, I have utter confidence in the forces of nature to solve this problem in the long run.

We humans are the most destructive species ever known and we are constantly building a more and more toxic global environment, bit by piece by layer, that eventually it will catch up with us. It may be in hundreds or thousands of years, or millions of years — but we seem to be on an inexorable path to self-destruction.

My religion is the wondrous combination of chemistry, physics, natural law, and evolution — and just as the earth and nature have provided the environment into which we could evolve and exist, the earth and its nature will at some point, by use of those same forces, cleanse itself of us.

Perhaps it will be our invention of artificially produced nuclear radiation — or the buildup of hard toxins in our soil and water and air — or the evolution of a universally fatal supermicrobe, stronger than COVID-19 — or terminal mutations of our genome caused by the combined deleterious pollutants we have produced — or other lethalties we have yet to discover, comprehend, or understand.

But in any case, I cannot imagine that humanity as a whole could possibly come together and create workable solutions to the immense depths and breadths of problems of industrial waste, pollutions of various sorts, anthropogenic factors of climate change, microbes that are increasingly resistant to the antibiotic medications upon which we are so heavily reliant, and other destructive activities we are carrying out. There is simply no chance of worldwide understanding of these macro-forces and, more especially, the political and personal will to make necessary changes. Just look at what is happening right here, right now, in our counties, states, and nation, with the massive rollbacks of environmental pro-

tections and with infectious disease.

We humans are smart enough to be able create what will destroy us, and we are stupid enough use it against ourselves. The flow of evolution carries on in good form, with or without us, and we are not critical to its success or failure — we are simply a part of its journey into the future and its history of the past.

Geologic and evolutionary time progress, slowly but with great sureness. Humans, coyotes, and cockroaches are wonderfully adaptive species and we've all done very well. In the long term, however, I'm betting on the cockroaches and their friends. We vertebrates, especially humans, are just too fragile to stand up to

the deluge of our autogenic toxins and anthropogenic destruction of the normal balancing systems of our Mother Earth, and that balance is what she is always aware of and continuously using to defend herself. And so we die out as a species — good riddance(?) — and our ecological niches are filled by something else. That is perfectly fair and is the manner in which our earth has been operating for some billions of years — balance, rebalance, re-re-balance — always seeking to heal damaging insults with an action oriented toward balance. We have caused, and are accelerating causation of "disbalance," and we will pay the price.

I like to think of the earth as a petri dish (remember high school biology?) with the entire crust as the agar. We humans are the microbe that has been introduced into this petri dish and we are progressing through the normal evolution of the introduced colony — the lag phase in which we gear up for rapid reproduction, the logarithmic growth phase in which we super-populate our environment, the phase of critical overpopulation and reduction due to increasing toxic waste and insufficient food, and the final phase of elimination.

We humans, as related to our earth, are the equivalent of the bacterium that has been introduced into the petri dish — and we are currently in the phase of rapid growth heading toward critical overpopulation. When that happens, be it in few hundred years or longer, so that our food supply is insufficient and our living environment is sufficiently entoxified, we enter the elimination phase. Food insecurity is already, today, becoming a more and more sig-

nificant problem especially in the developing nations of the world. Add to that the immense amounts of waste being generated by the developed world, and with the pollution of our oceans and air and fresh water, the situation becomes more grave.

Then consider rising sea levels and the many hundreds of millions of people living in coastal megacities who will be necessitated to migrate inland and who have no skills in food production or shelter construction — but do have weapons and they are in search of food and shelter. The potential for social chaos and warfare increases to pathological heights.

Mother Earth is a welcoming hostess until she has been violated, and when that has happened, despite her efforts to make allowances for remediation, she cannot show mercy — and need not. Her evolutionary life marches on, leaving violators as detritus in its wake, and creating new life forms to fill the multitudes of ecological niches that have become available.

It is a pity that, due to our greed and stupidity, we will take with us so many other living creatures — all vertebrates at very least, uncountable numbers of plant species but perhaps not insects.

What insect(s) do you suppose will take our place and what will they look like? Handsome dudes and lovely beauties of some sort, or something like the monsters in sci-fi imaginations?

Or maybe — just maybe — might a few humans be left? Like the pastoral peoples out herding cattle and camels and sheep and goats yaks in the back-bush country of Africa or the semideserts of Central Asia or the frozen places of the far Northern Hemisphere? Could there be a second chance for humanity to begin a cycle that would take a path different than ours? Or would they follow our example that leads to self-destruction?

Wouldn't it be interesting to be around to see what happens in the next few million years?

Andrew Clark is a veterinarian living in Pendleton, who has had two distinctly different careers. He worked 22 years for the Oregon Department of Agriculture as a field veterinarian in Eastern Oregon and as state veterinarian in Salem. The second career, which continues, has been about 25 years of international work, mostly in the nations of eastern Africa between Capetown and Cairo.

YOUR VIEWS

Coronavirus panic is government and media hype

While no one discounts the effects of the virus going on across the country, the "hype" being pushed by the media, and Gov. Kate Brown, is causing people to think this is either an earth-ending crisis, or is simply another "fake news item" being pushed to control the people. This might shock some people, but it is not an earth-ending crisis but is more of a government/media-created panic. Between dear Kate Brown and her allies in the media, they have done a great job in showing how easy it is to control the thoughts, and actions, of the masses.

With the latest round of overreach by Brown and the media, the public is still being fed gloom and doom about how many cases and related deaths are being reported each and every day. Where are the headlines attempting to calm the masses by showing that 98%-plus of cases recover? One hardly ever reads those numbers.

Millions of private sector employees are losing their jobs and are being told it is because of the virus. This is true, especially in the hospitality and restaurant businesses. While these people are forced to live on unemployment, public employees are told to stay home, some working from home, some not, all continuing to receive full paychecks. Don't get me wrong, but why are public employees still being fully compensated while not working? Remember the old saying, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander."

In the Saturday *East Oregonian* there is an article by Eder Campuzano, of *The Oregonian* newspaper, titled "Online schools also subject to closure order." In the article, obtained from the alternative weekly, state officials worried with brick- and-mortar schools shuttered, families would flock to the free online academies if online schools were allowed to continue to operate. And among the reasons why state officials fear is that families will drop out of neighborhood schools in favor of online courses, which would decrease funding for brick-and-mortar schools across the state. This is the one and only reason Kate Brown closed online schools! Money, money and more money is all Brown thinks about.

As the mayor of Chicago once said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." Well folks, Kate Brown, with the help of the media, is following the left's playbook to a point of great overreaching into the daily lives of the residents.

John Harvey
Stanfield

Coronavirus and climate change must both be addressed

It's refreshing to hear our leaders relying on data, science and experts to combat the threat of the coronavirus. Thankfully, we are quickly taking disruptive actions to help "flatten the curve" of infection.

Global climate change is a slower evolving crisis whose intensity increases over years and decades rather than days and weeks. The consensus among scientists around the world is that we must immediately begin implementing changes to flatten the curve of climate change.

Success in addressing both crises cannot rely on wishful thinking — "hoping for the best." We need scientifically literate leaders, supported by an informed public, to devise and implement reasoned solutions.

Ron Fonger
Pendleton