

2020 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 3rd Prize]

The Ripple Effect

(Original)

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Dear Krishna,

I am writing this in a makeshift tent on a mountain. Yes, after several months of planning and preparation, my colleagues and I finally embarked on another mission. This time, it is for a community of Lumads- indigenous groups from the southern part of the archipelago. I am excited to see this tent transform into an equipped, fully functioning, concrete health clinic to cater to the needs of the ethnic minorities. For now, our once a month visit here to conduct health check ups and out-patient surgeries would hopefully suffice and make healthcare more accessible. It is such a breath of fresh air to be outside, to meet a diverse group of people, and to realize that being a doctor does not stop the moment you walk out of the hospital. I know you have always been curious of what the future holds, well let me tell you that a decade has passed since the pandemic. The knee jerk reaction after the pandemic was to strengthen healthcare systems and to revive the economy. After all, everybody was reminded that a strong economy needs healthy citizens, and a strong economy is needed to maintain the population's health. However, the relationship between health and economy is not a dyad; health is multifactorial such that the environment, education, and politics, among others, also affect a person's overall well-being. As I look into this scenic view from where I am, a drizzle is starting and I am reminded of how nature sustains every human endeavor, including the nourishment for our health. You have realized this in your youth, I know that achieving a more sustainable environment is an advocacy dear to your heart and you have already taken small actions. I remember you putting up posters that encourage customers to bring their own reusable lunch boxes and utensils in take out canteens. Well, people today have also realized our dependence on nature, that the relationship that we have with the environment is fragile

and that disruption of even the most basic element in an ecosystem can create a ripple effect that transcends borders. As studies showed that most epidemics like AIDS, Ebola, SARS, the most recent COVID-19, and many more originated from animals and wildlife, the public has become more aware that disease is an environmental issue as much as it is a political one. You would be happy to hear that legislations are being passed and being strictly implemented to stop further deforestation and loss of wildlife habitat, to halt dumping of chemicals, toxic substances and garbage in rivers, to improve practices of the livestock industry, and to shift to sustainable energy sources. Biodegradable and sustainable alternatives to single use plastic bags and cutlery among others are now made available. Our neighborhood, which was once so against plastic bans, has been active in recycling and receptive in patronizing more environment-friendly shops and businesses. As for the healthcare sector where most supplies are single use and disposable, it is still a challenge to do away with plastics as cross reactions and contaminations must be prevented. However, you would be proud to know that I am part of an international collaboration that researches on how to manufacture medical supplies from other sources such as algae and plants which show promising results. We still have a long way to go, but creating lasting change is not a sprint but a marathon. The challenge for the future is making these advancements accessible to everyone, even for people in remote areas like where I am now. For now, never tire of bringing your own reusable utensils for lunch and urging your friends to do the same. You may not realize it, but these small actions can generate a ripple effect that transcends generations and prevent another epidemic. Prepare yourself well so that you may provide the best care for your future patients and the environment, as a doctor and as an advocate. The road ahead will get tougher but always let truth, passion, and advocacy guide and remind you of why you started in the first place. You will never lose your way if you never lose your why. Until then.

With love,
33-year-old Krisha