

# EDITOR'S MESSAGE

## The Plague of Florence in 1348

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As I turn the page to a new year, I have had the opportunity to review some literature from years past— 650 years in the past to be more accurate. Giovanni Boccaccio's collection of novellas, the *Decameron*, was a classic of medieval plague literature. The writing presents the depiction of a disease that held a city under siege for years. While his writing vividly illustrates the mental, spiritual and physical tolls associated with the plague that spread through Europe in the 14th century (see excerpt below), it also captured the spirit of renewal and recreation in defiance of a decimating pandemic. He speaks of fragrant nose coverings, social distancing and public officials attempting to minimize transmission risk, making this classic prose resonate with our modern-day world. Despite the human suffering seen, the story paints a brighter picture describing the prescriptions for physical survival based upon psychological framing and the restorative power of structured rituals and human contact.



I hope you can enjoy this issue of the *Osteopathic Family Physician* and find time to read or revisit literature from the near or distant past!

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*"I say, then, that the years [of the era] of the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God had attained to the number of one thousand three hundred and forty-eight, when into the notable city of Florence, fair over every other of Italy, there came the death-dealing pestilence, which, through the operation of the heavenly bodies or of our own iniquitous dealings, being sent down upon mankind for our correction by the just wrath of God, had some years before appeared in the parts of the East and after having bereft these latter of an innumerable number of inhabitants, extending without cease from one place to another, had now unhappily spread towards the West.*

*The condition of the common people (and belike, in great part, of the middle class also) was yet more pitiable to behold, for that these, for the most part, retained by hope or poverty in their houses and abiding in their own quarters, sickened by the thousand daily and being altogether untended and unsuccored, sickened by the thousand daily, died well nigh all without recourse."*

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The plague of Florence in 1348, as described in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Etching by L. Sabatelli after himself. Wellcome Collection/Wikimedia Commons